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Central European Planning Culture and its Competitive Advantages and Disadvantages in Enhancing Regional Competitiveness

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Abstract
Spatial planning is a set of managerial activities focused on a given territory's balanced and sustainable development and territorial subjects. It is obvious that planning in general, and especially the role of the planners, has been lately substantially modified – they shifted their societal positions from regulators and designers of our future toward the facilitators of versatile and multidimensional processes of spatial development. In this process, variables and phenomena like community, identity, place, social behaviour or human values play a significant role more than ever. Planning has overreached its normative essence and is by now a multidimensional participatory process reflecting the cultural background of the society. The unique character of any given planning culture is determined by the value system, which is mediated by and mirrored in the acting, communication, and leadership patterns. Understanding cultural dynamics and developing a clear vision of the desired planning culture based on democratic leadership and its active fostering should be essential competencies of any planner. Recent societal developments (fragmentation of the society, negative demographic change, endangered social cohesion) highlighted the need for special attention dedicated to these issues. It has been confirmed that highly profiled planning cultures based on active leadership generating a typical set of principles, values and approaches are arguably as important for any territory's balanced and sustainable development as a wide array of normative and formal instruments. A productive planning culture based on democratic decision-making and effective leadership is becoming a vital part of regional competitiveness – the ability of the city, region, or whole state to be successful in different competitions and interactions with other subjects or partners. Our contribution is to analyze the main scope of planning culture and its role in increasing regional or territorial competitiveness, and it concentrates on special traits of Central European planning culture in this regard.

Keywords
planning culture, participative planning, leadership, values, Central Europe, regional competitiveness

Introduction

Current European political and spatial development indicates that democratic systems based upon civil and democratic values of transparency and participatory decision-making are under heavy pressure. Negative megatrends and a contemporary highly volatile international environment delivered complex challenges never seen before. Values of democratic decision-making and broad participation of various stakeholders and societal segments have been lately questioned by the policy of growing nationalism, populism and unilateral politics. This represents a major shift toward ambiguity and uncertainty in all aspects of spatial development and spatial planning and is heavily influencing all the processes of regional competition and cooperation (Gavurova et al., 2022). Regional competitiveness is based both on hard factors and preconditions as well as on soft factors related more to management styles, soft skills, leadership and culture patterns and behavioural issues related to new abilities to improvise, cope with difficulties or think out of the box (for more, see, for instance, Giffinger et al., 2005).

Mere old normative tools are not sufficient anymore to secure balanced and sustainable spatial development. The attention of scholars, researchers and decision-makers shifted towards soft tools, showing higher flexibility in the process of dealing with highly unstable and volatile external environments (see, for instance, Christmann et al., 2020). Values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights need to be accented and further promoted in a new, highly efficient way, being able to overcome the current external and internal threats and in-stabilities. A declining level of confidence towards the political bodies takes its toll on decreased social and territorial cohesion, exposing old structural weaknesses and underestimated pitfalls of accelerated spatial development (see, for instance, Gajdoš, Pašiak, 2006). Democratic governance needs new impulses to be able to react flexibly to threats from external and internal environments and to generate innovative spatial and social solutions for the entire society. Regional competitiveness of any territorial subject is thus a highly volatile construct, continuously evolving and absorbing all the impacts from the external environment.

Within the context of the principal goals of European spatial development, it is obvious that the research should be focused not only on innovative management and development of effective standard planning tools and frameworks but also on informal and soft tools of spatial development in respective countries and regions. Planning culture, deeply embedded in the broader cultural and social milieu of European countries and relying on patterns of democratic, participatory and transparent decision-making processes typical for civic society and open governance, is an undisputable hallmark in this field. Effective territorial governance must be in harmony and concordance with underlying, often non-visible and non-tangible elements of societal processes.

Intensive discussion on planning culture has been running for several years (see, for instance, Sanyal, 2005; Keim et al., 2002; Buhler and Stephenson, 2021; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2015 or Purkarthofer et al., 2021) and despite several misunderstandings and lack of methodology, its intensity has since then aggravated. Hierarchical planning cultures based upon authoritarian decision-making proved to be inefficient and inappropriate when dealing with complex problems of high dynamics and multilateral impacts (Märker and Schmidt-Belz, 2000). They failed, especially in the effort to organize acceptance and sustainability of the decisions. Even the planning cultures based on incrementalism were not able to manage various spatial conflicts and controversies. Planning culture and participatory planning are also necessary from a practical point of view – one of the recent challenges is the transition towards renewable energy sources, and the quality of participatory planning is essential for their acceptance (Stober et al., 2021). Democratic and participative planning culture, from our point of view, might be deemed as specific, unique, as well as typical, non-casual set of approaches (based on underlying values) toward the factors playing fundamental roles in the process of spatial development within a certain territory, based upon the broad, transparent and intensive participation of all actors (see Jaššo, Finka 2019). In a narrower sense, democratic planning culture is a superposition of the overall democratic governance system at the territorial, spatial, and social levels, influencing all spatial development processes in a deep and manifold manner.

Starting from 1990, planning discourse has been widely influenced by request for a "communication turn" (see, for instance, Healey 1993) or "cultural turn" (Knieling, Othengrafen 2009), which means continuous proliferation of consensus and cooperation-based behavioural patterns and proceedings, giving necessary added value to the planning process and having synergy with traditional or formal approaches (for more, see, for instance, Jaššo, Finka, 2019 or Jaššo, 2008, a,b and Finka, Jaššo 2007, 2013). Planning became discursive and contingent in its nature (Keim et al., 2002), and the role of the spatial planner has been significantly modified and changed. Once an omnipotent visionary and social engineer, the planner became a facilitator and moderator of societal processes with high dynamics and ambiguous outputs. Space for the involvement of "small players ", local actors, and the general public has been widened in an unprecedented way. The traditional regulatory nature of planning has been questioned and challenged in many disputes between experts and the broader public (see, for instance, Keim et al., 2002; Mäntysalo, 2005). Overall, redefinition of the relationship between the planners and the environment is commonly regarded as a more intelligent approach (Rode, 2006). Permanent and continual feedback among all the actors in the planning process significantly influenced new emerging planning cultures related to this paradigm (for more, see, for instance, Jaššo, Finka, 2019 or Jaššo et al., 2023). Citizen engagement

and their participatory approach toward all the scales of planning play an irreplaceable role here and are considered to be a crucial part of many mutually interacting spheres – territorial cohesion, territorial capital or regional competitiveness.

Smooth, successful and genuine spatial development requires cultural compatibility and continuity (for more, see, for instance, Jaššo, 2008a,b or Finka, Jaššo, 2007, 2013). Planning is always a process of resolving spatial, social or economic conflicts. Effective management of these conflicts is necessary for success in any form of regional competition. These contradictions and conflicts among participating actors must be transformed into a mutually viable network of common assets and advantages – only in this case is the territorial subject able to be successful in various forms of regional and territorial competitions or partnerships. Integration of different values, basic assumptions and beliefs into a coherent spatial concept is a necessity and ultimate challenge for spatial planners. Forrester's concept of "making sense together" has been completed by Healey's addition "while living differently" (see, for instance, Mäntysalo, 2005; Healy, 1997; Forrester, 1989). The efficiency of consensus-oriented planning culture, or cooperative planning effort, strongly depends on the degree of trust and tolerance. Thus, a democratic and transparent planning culture might be deemed a significant contributor to smooth and democratic decision-making related not only to spatial development but also to characterizing society as a whole. This makes a democratic and participative planning culture an invaluable contribution toward the overall democratic governance of Europe.

Planning culture as a specific, unique, as well as typical, non-casual set of approaches to the factors playing principal roles in the process of spatial development (Jaššo, Finka, 2019) might be considered one of the softest dimensions of spatial planning and an important non-proprietary part of social and territorial capital. Culture is a collective asset accumulating proven, known and effective ways of handling spatial problems and conserving behavioural patterns which are legible and expected in a given community, territory or social system (see Li and Karakowsky, 2001; Hofstede, 1997). Its competitive advantage is not only in securing smooth proceeding of spatial procedures but involves invaluable assets *per se* – effective and democratic planning culture increases the motivation of actors, their commitment and identification with the social system and makes the whole socio-cultural system an attractive model by view from outside.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Discussions on European planning culture and their roles in European spatial development and planning, in general, have been initiated in the seminar-workshop Planning Culture in the Central and Eastern European Countries (29th June 2005) in Bratislava and has been continuously promoted within the various scientific platforms and international research projects. Annual conferences and workshops of Spa-ce.net (a network covering the Central European and Southeastern European academic and research institutions dealing with spatial planning and spatial development) were dedicated to many topics addressing the issues of planning cultures in direct or indirect ways. Special attention was devoted to Central European planning culture, its peculiarities, idiosyncratic traits and overall cultural background of planning in Central Europe. Discussions with researchers and scholars from Prague, Vienna, Ljubljana, Brno, Budapest, Belgrade, and Tirana delivered valuable reflections on this topic, merging different experiences from scientific discourse and planning practice in respective countries and regions. These discussions were used as inspiration and a basis for this research paper and complemented by a thorough literature review.

Planning culture was also addressed in other projects dealing with the territory of Central Europe. Project Metronet was investigating the personal cooperation of actors and decision-makers in Central Europe. Project POLYCE aimed to analyze the positioning of 5 Central European big cities (Vienna, Bratislava, Prague, Budapest, Ljubljana) in international markets and their potential for cooperation and competitiveness. Issues of cultural compatibility, similarities among planning patterns and spatial behaviour of actors, and overall values that determine decision-making in planning practice were thoroughly investigated in a series of interviews, questionnaires, and workshops. Underlying sources of Central European planning culture were investigated in various desk research activities, comparing planning methodology, utilizing various formal and informal planning instruments and evaluation of the results from planning practice.

Cultural elements were the target of our investigation also in smaller scale projects, for instance, within a project funded by the Austrian-Slovak scholarship bilateral programme focused on mapping out the project CENTROPE where the two decades of regional development of the region CENTROPE (covering border regions of Austria, Slovakia, Hungary and Czech republic) were studied and analyzed. Interviews with the mayors of small municipalities in Austria, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, as well as with former regional politicians, researchers, scholars or decision makers, shed light on the roots and perspectives of region CENTROPE, its cultural background and the importance of cultural compatibility of the entire planning process. Common cultural traditions, similar perceptions of the roles within the spatial development process, and a common vision of the metropolitan region between Vienna and Bratislava have proved to be crucial factors in successful cooperation and future perspectives.

Current spatial planning discourse on concepts of competitiveness, planning cultures and regional competitiveness

Concept of Regional Competitiveness

The concept of regional competitiveness has been intensively discussed in the field of spatial planning, behavioural economy and regional development since the 1990s. It is linked to the shift from focusing on national states to the regions and regional levels and deepening their roles in the public administration (Loughlin, 2007; Harmaakorpi & Rinkinen, 2020) by the principle of subsidiarity and efficiency of public administration (Hooghe et al., 2010). It is sometimes called 'a rise of the meso' (Keating, 2013), reflecting the growing interest in local conditions for exercising governance (Torre & Bourdin, 2023). In this place, it is important to distinguish that regional competitiveness is understood as a factor of spatial development, where spatial development policies (including regional development policies) aim to foster regional competitiveness, and competitiveness of planning culture enhances regional competitiveness.

Most definitions and approaches are based on "the idea of successfully keeping up and then prevailing over other entities in a given context "(Grassia et al., 2022, p.2) and might be observed on an individual or organizational level. Huovari et al. (2001) define regional competitiveness as the ability of regions to perpetuate and attract mobile production factors. Huggins et al. (2021) in their understanding focus on the long-run potential of localities, cities and regions to generate economic growth and well-paid employment, signifying the attention of competitiveness on private companies and conditions in the regions for them to thrive and create jobs. Krugman (2003), rather a sceptic of the competitiveness concept in his earlier works (e.g. Krugman 1994 or Krugman 1998), suggests that the competitiveness of a region should be based on its ability to provide sufficiently attractive wages or employment prospects. For regions, it is therefore essential that competitiveness not only leads to increasing market shares in a particular industry but also raises the quality of life and standard of living, as this should be the end goal of competitive activity (Huggins et al., 2013; Aiginger, 2006; Storper, 1997; Jencova et al. 2022). The more recent concept of constructed advantage (Asheim et al., 2011) additionally stresses the regional dynamics for learning and innovation, requiring improvements in the economy, governance, knowledge infrastructure, and community and culture (Harmaakorpi & Rinkinen, 2020).

There is a growing body of literature on green competitiveness (Cheng et al., 2019; Porter, 1991; IMD, 2017). It can be defined as the ability to gain a competitive advantage in the market based on the green economy model of environmental protection, healthy and sustainable development goals (Porter, 1991), or as the ability to maintain a good ecological environment with high resource utilization and good environmental governance (Cheng et al.., 2019; Skare et al., 2023). Hu (2015) adds that ecological and environmental competitiveness is an expression of the pressures and the current state of the regional ecological and environmental systems, their ability to support regional development activities, and the active coordination ability of humans.

Besides economic and 'green' focus, some authors emphasize human capital as the intrinsic aspect of regional competitiveness, besides focusing on the business environment and good conditions for private companies (Malecki, 2007). Here, the ability of regions to attract creative and innovative people or provide high-quality cultural facilities are all important features of regional competitive advantage (Kitson et al., 2004). We can say that regional competitiveness is increasingly concerned with soft factors (Martin, 2005), such as creativity, knowledge, and environmental conditions, rather than purely based on accumulated wealth (Huggins, 2013; Bednarova et al., 2023).

Competitiveness is the ability to secure an advantage in various competitions and deliver the framework for measuring the performance of actors in competition and providing precious feedback regarding this performance. Cities, regions, or countries are in specific positions, entering many parallelly running competitions and being active in many competitive as well as cooperative interactions and behavioural patterns. Competition between cities and regions existed in reduced forms for centuries ago. However, even after the process of 'market enlarging', its significance has risen. In the past, the competition between cities was not as accentuated as recently, as was seen in medieval European cities that were more motivated to cooperate (Faludi, 2018; Le Goff, 1992). The global character of urban and regional competition differs radically from mere rivalry, which has been mainly referred to neighbouring towns or several leading harbour towns and centres of trade. It is a process with the highest degree of complexity, where the competition's participants are one of the most complex and structured systems generated by human beings – regions and cities themselves (see, for instance, Giffinger et al., 2005). This has led to many changes on a strategic level and in the political behaviour of the cities (Giffinger et al., 2005, p.12)

The increasing urban competition was reinforced by the phenomenon of economic globalization, which led to internationalization, the 'enlarging' of markets, and the removal of obstacles and hindrances to the free market. The established global system of financing, production, and market areas has created conditions for free competition in general, as well as new types of competition between cities and their spread on a worldwide basis (Tkacova & Gavurova, 2023). The success of a city or region nowadays is based on the role it plays in a global system and on its integration into the world economy (global cities, see, for instance, Giffinger, 2005). Due to the worldwide processes of globalization, democratic decentralization and liberalization, the national governments

have fewer opportunities to influence (in both positive and negative sense) their economic development, but, in turn, the role of lower hierarchic units - regions and cities, is increasing. For cities, this opens new chances and new markets that are no longer spatially limited to their closest surroundings. In the global market, any region, city, or town can compete for capital on an international scale (Gavurova et al., 2025). Among the main factors of competitiveness, we can include increased originality, efficiency, complexity, and increase in supply, with higher quality, better accessibility, and better cost-effectiveness (see Finka, 2005). Therefore, the city is not competing with its surrounding area or the other cities of the same country but much more with similar-sized cities from other countries competing for the same international resources. At the same time, this brings more responsibility to cities for future development.

The regional dimension of many competitive patterns got into the spotlight, especially after the millennium (Grassia, 2022), and also on the level of the European Union and its cohesion policy (Lengyel, 2004). Regions became essential economic, social, cultural, and spatial development sources in a highly globalized and volatile world. This was reflected in the EU's Lisbon Agenda aimed at creating "the most competitive, knowledge-driven economy by 2010" (European Commission, 2003). The competitive strength of a region is not a mere sum of the competitive strength of local and regional entrepreneurial subjects but is an aggregation of all sources of regional/territorial capital and its optimal utilization in many sectors. Human resources, innovative potential, and cultural background play a prominent role in this process.

Huggins et al. (2021) further explain that regional competitiveness is not "not a zero-sum game and does not rely on the shifting of a finite amount of resources from one place to another", suggesting the need for the "development of all places together". Torre & Bourdin (2021) advances this idea by shifting attention from the "international competitiveness of a few companies located in metropolitan areas" to focusing on "endogenous economic dynamics and local economic systems". In this understanding, planning culture, perceived broadly as a way of how decisions are being made, how the processes are set up and what are the expectations and demands of stakeholders, is an integral part of regional competitiveness that needs to be considered and worked with during the decision-making processes. Harmaakorpi & Rinkinen (2020) further add that visionary capacity is one of the key components of regional competitiveness, helping to increase the absorption capacity of regions. However, how these visions are formulated and, more importantly, how they are later on taken up and utilized is, to a great extent, defined by the underlying planning culture.

Understanding of Planning Culture

Recent experiences from spatial development have shown that planning culture is one of the most important so-called soft factors in planning (de Vries, 2015; Valler and Phelps, 2018). The planning process is a delicate and multifocal process consisting of hard regulatory factors and a plethora of invisible contributing issues based upon the collective experience of the community, nation, or generation. Cultural issues play an important role, especially in a democratic society where every step is a result of collective consensus transmitted by the democratic election process. Every planning culture is deeply rooted not only in physical territory but in the society as a whole – its values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions. Planning culture is thus a specific cultural subsystem of the society – similar to the culture of specific branches and the corporate culture of companies active within the territory or national culture. Unfortunately, research on planning cultures is largely descriptive, as only a few contributions propose a model for understanding how these planning cultures are actually constituted (Buhler, Stephenson, 2021) and current conceptualizations are considered "overly static" (Purkarthofer et al., 2021, p.245).

There are a plethora of approaches and definitions of planning culture. According to Knieling and Othengrafen (2009), the term planning culture refers to the different planning systems and traditions, institutional arrangements of spatial development, knowledge, beliefs, norms and values and the broader cultural context of planning. Local culture affects the organizational structure of spatial planning, resulting in different styles of project management (Patiwael et al., 2022), rendering different approaches to leadership (de Bony, 2010), communication (Ochieng & Price, 2009) and negotiation (Hurn 2007). Sanyal (2005) defines planning culture as 'the collective ethos and dominant attitudes of planners regarding the appropriate role of the state, market forces and civil society in influencing social outcomes. It affects planners' worldviews, cognitive frames, practice, and outcomes (Stead et al., 2015).

Our definition describes the planning culture as a specific, unique, as well as typical, non-casual set of approaches (based on underlying values) toward the factors playing fundamental roles in the process of spatial development within certain territory (see, for instance, Jaššo, 2008a, b; Jaššo, 2011; Jaššo, Finka, 2019).

Culture is always deeply engraved in the collective perception of the community or social system, and it is one of the main drivers of societal continuity – recollects what is (presumably) wrong and what is right, which solutions proved to be effective or ineffective and which behavioural patterns are considered to be acceptable and which are refused (more on the general models of human culture see, for instance, Geertz, 1973; Ouchi, 1981;

Schein, 1992 or Hofstede, 2001). Every culture is interpretative and has various connotations – knowledge of the interpretation codes varies between insiders and outsiders. The sense of belonging to a certain culture is based upon the ability to read and interpret these codes (Jaššo, Finka, 2019). Interaction and accumulation of data, knowledge and experience are engines of every planning culture (Jaššo, 2011).

Many different approaches and definitions of the planning culture have appeared in recent years and decades, though a clear, unifying methodology is still rather missing. Definitions based upon the mere delimitation of the content of the planning culture are rather operational and relatively wide (for more, see Jaššo, Finka, 2019). Their descriptive nature emphasizes the fact that planning culture cannot be observed in laboratories but is living in everyday practice and a plethora of daily routines of spatial planning. Keller et al. (in Sanyal 2005, p.30) include in the main scopes of planning culture the tasks and subject matter of planning, the organization, structures and legal frameworks in which planning practices are embedded and the background assumptions, values and general orientation that guide planning endeavours. For Rode (2006), the planning culture represents "different social contexts and values are ultimately generating a particular planning approach", and Dollinger (In Fürst 2007) refers to "the ways how the decision-makers are dealing with planning processes". According to Diller (in Umfrage zur Planungskultur, 2007), a significant part of planning culture is the self-perception of actors involved in spatial planning and their mutual interactions.

Another group of definitions is based upon the group of factors which can be objectively observable in the form of some behavioural expression or behavioural patterns (see Jaššo, Finka, 2019). Friedmann (2005) defines planning culture as "the ways, both formal and informal, that spatial planning in a given-multi-national region, country or city is conceived, institutionalized and enacted", and Ludwig (In Fürst, 2007) defines planning culture as "the patterns of behavioural interaction between planners and stakeholders". According to Beutl (in Umfrage zur Planungskultur, 2007), planning culture coordinates the spatial behaviour of various actors, not only planners and stakeholders.

Every culture consists of visible and deeper, "invisible" content, which is also reflected in the holistic approaches toward planning culture (Jaššo, Finka 2019). Planning culture in this sense might be one of the applications or derivations of universal Gullestrup's (2005) model of culture (Knieling and Othengrafen 2009, p.6). His model of planning culture consists of the vertical and horizontal dimensions. The horizontal dimension integrates segments demonstrated on the same level: processing/technological segment, distribution segment, social segment, managerial and decision-making segment, conveyance segment, integration segment, identity-creating segment and security segment. Adjusted to planning culture theory, the processing segment covers work with data and statistics. Identity segments cover the role, prestige, and self-image of spatial planners; managerial/decision-making segments represent the way and the manner in which planning decisions are made, which leadership style is preferred, etc. Vertical dimension includes cultural layers which are hierarchically established (some of them are clearly visible, some are semi-hidden or completely hidden): manifested symbols, immediately perceptible layers, barely perceptible layers, formalized norms and rules, core culture layers, non-perceptible layers, basic values and the fundamental concept of universe (elaborated according to Jaššo, Finka 2019). Knieling, Othengrafen (2009) and Steinhauer (2011) introduced a similar model based upon the understanding of planning culture as a synthesis of the societal environment (self-conception of planning, societal models, concept of justice), planning environment (planning semiotics, instruments and procedures, tradition, scopes and range of spatial planning, economic structure) and planning artefacts (urban design, plans, data, laws, instrument and procedures). In his understanding, Faludi (In Fürst, 2007) emphasizes the ethical dimension - the planning culture is, especially the "collective ethos and dominant attitude of planners regarding the appropriate role of the state, market forces, and civil society in influencing social outcomes ". Keim et al. (2002) define planning culture as a "repertoire for planning practice "consisting of "the underlying planning assumptions, leading ideas and images, rationalities bound to consensus building and conflict management, norms and rules "on the one hand and the "planning styles "incorporating the utilized knowledge and forms of cooperation on the other hand.

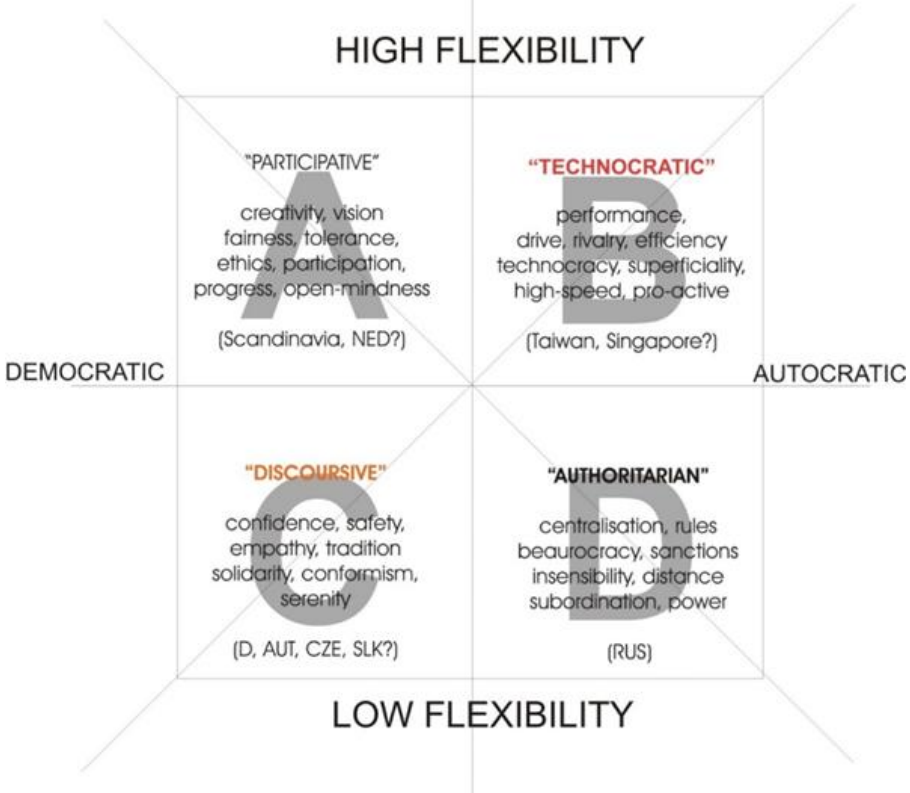

Fig. 1. Model of typology of planning cultures (source authors)

Our model of typology of planning culture is based upon the assumption that every culture consists of universal, repeatable variables (for instance, degree of freedom in the decision-making process) as well as unique, idiosyncratic variables present in a given cultural milieu. The former variables can be investigated by standardized methods (for instance, questionnaires and comparative profiles), and the latter can be researched by individual methods (for instance, workshops and interviews). Diagnostics and research of planning culture provide precious information on processes running in the framework of developing planning culture in various spatial management levels and in various units and actors (municipal offices, state institutions, mayors, spatial planners, etc.). Meaningful and contra-productive traits of the current planning culture are being exposed, and options for change and adjustment can be discussed and proposed. It may be used as a background report for the design of specific strategies in the field of communication, motivation, leadership and transparency of spatial planning discourse.

The model is based on the following main dimensions:

- horizontal dimension is mapping out the degree of democratic versus autocratic decision-making at various levels.
- vertical dimension is mapping out a system's flexibility and ability to react properly to changes in the external and internal environment.

A combination of both dimensions generates the following typology of cultures (see Jaššo, Finka, 2019 or Jaššo et al., 2023):

A – Participative culture

Participative planning culture is focused on the wide participation of different actors in spatial development, and mutual consensus is the key milestone of its effectiveness. This type of culture is present in societies built upon strong cohesion and balance, and each change/shift is rather evolutional, considering the feedback and consensus. Power hierarchy in this culture is rather weak, and the culture is highly inclusive, especially toward "small players" and marginalized groups within the society.

Values:

Creativity, innovation, progress, shared vision, target orientation, fair competition, conception, tolerance, flexibility, ethics, beliefs, individual freedom.

Competitive advantage:

Support of liberal and open thinking, proper conditions for creative development, agreeable social climate, honest and friendly social relationships, strong vision, new ideas and thoughts.

Successful leader is:

Independent, creative, visionary, open, team-oriented, supportive, productive, flexible, fair.

B – Technocratic culture

Technocratic culture is focused on results and progress; its success is measured by economic efficiency, and the small stakeholders do not have much to say. This culture is rather pragmatic and ideologically free and leans highly on economic, quantitative, or other directly measurable factors and elements. Economic factors like return on investment, cost/benefit ratio and economic sustainability play a major role. Sometimes, it is more "evidence-based planning" than "planning for the people ".

Values:

Competition, rivalry, high efficiency, performance, endurance, individuality, drive, conflicts, motivation, pro-activity, superficiality.

Competitive advantage:

Strong personalities could find self-realization in this type of culture, and the support of individuals and extraordinary performances enable the excelling of prominent individuals. Overall, good target-oriented work climate, quick (especially quantitative) feedback and a certain flexibility in the decision-making process.

Successful leader is: individualistic, calculating, tactic, closed, calm, inscrutable, professional, ambitious, and resistant.

C – Discursive culture

Culture focused on integration and evolution. This culture has arisen by modifying the rather obsolete, normative, rational-predictive culture of organized modernity into a more communicative and sensitive one. However, the transition was never completely smooth, and this culture retained some "old features", mainly a high degree of bureaucracy and high inertia. This type of culture is most similar to the main scope of Central European planning culture.

Values:

Integrity, serenity, safety, confidence, cohesion, solidarity, conformism, lower flexibility, lower efficiency.

Competitive advantage:

Social safety and social cohesion, backed by data and research, stability, efficient performance of routine tasks and risk aversive decision making.

Successful leader is:

Responsible, considering, advisory, competent, empathic, coaching, rightful, awarding, loyal.

D – Authoritarian culture

Culture is strongly related to national culture realms and the tradition of the current or former totalitarian regimes. A strictly bureaucratic culture is based upon numerous restrictions, rules, and norms. Participation is rather low, and small stakeholders are outsiders in decision-making. Various power alliances are ruling the system, and they are highly resistant to changes.

Values:

Rules, centralization, sanctions, insensibility, distance, subordination, authority, power, order.

Competitive advantage:

Unified external behaviour, the ability to keep the structure, resistance toward external turbulences.

Successful leader is:

Powerful, haughty, arrogant, restrained, formal, insensible, strict, blunt, authoritarian.

The content of the planning culture is investigated in the following 10 dimensions. Each dimension is saturated by 3 mutually interlinked factors with high correlation, making a "cluster". The investigated dimensions are the following:

- Individual initiative (I.) - (responsibility, freedom, and independence)
- Risk-taking behaviour (II.) - (creativity, risk-taking behaviour, assertiveness)
- Leadership (III.) - (vision, goals, means)
- Integration (IV.) - (collaboration within a team, collaboration of teams, group cohesion)
- Support by management (V.) - (managerial communication, expression of support, active help)
- Control and restrictions (VI.) - (rules, limits and burdens, supervision and control)
- Identification (VII.) - (identification with planner profession, identification with working team, identification with own social role in the society)
- Perception of planners (VIII.) - (remuneration of planners, performance criteria, societal status)

- Management of spatial conflicts (IX.) - (nature of conflicts, mode of its resolution, prevention of conflicts)
- Communication patterns (X.) - (hierarchy, authority, bureaucracy)

Additionally, idiosyncratic factors are investigated by individual methods (interview, workshop). These are focused on unique, non-quantitative characteristics of investigated planning culture. Close cooperation between planners, researchers, and informal opinion leaders on various societal levels is essential.

Among other areas, we will be mapping out the following fields:

- the awareness of the term *planning culture* among the planners and researchers;
- their perception of the internal climate within the spatial planning discourse, preferred behavioural and interpersonal relations patterns;
- typical characteristics of social microclimate in the professional circle of planners, their associations, steering bodies, committees, etc.;
- particular means of Planning Culture – symbols, legends, myths and stories related to planning in the respective country;
- values within the planning discourse and planning process, their communication, representation and internalization; and
- internal communication patterns.

Central European Planning Culture

European planning cultures do exist in close and immediate interaction realms. Boundaries among them are rather fuzzy and diffuse. Similarities between planning cultures might appear and then fade away in long-term horizons. They influence each other, merge together in some fields, and inspire each other (see, for instance, project CULTPLAN). The level of interaction among European planning cultures has been significantly accelerated due to the general challenges of European macro space in recent years (climate crisis, migration, inflation, geopolitical threats). This makes benchmarking and comparison of European planning cultures highly promising managerial tools. Benchmarking should be utilized to control, monitor and evaluate the shifts and modifications within the respective planning cultures.

The territory of Central Europe was always a territory "in-between", absorbing many territorial shifts, redesigns of boundaries as well as competing identities. Its special position in European discourse was tackled in several highly influential essays and political statements (for instance, the essay of Timothy Gordon Ash "Does central Europe exist?" or Milan Kundera's "The Tragedy of Central Europe"). V. Bělohradský (2013) interprets Central Europe during the period of modernity as "a place where people underwent an existential experience of great historical importance for modern Europe, an experience whose fateful meaning Central European literature and philosophy sensed with an exceptional perspicacity "(p. 303). Whole Central European philosophy and literature analyzed "the absurdity of the impersonal language of legality "(Bělohradský 2013) having its roots in Austro-Hungarian empire and having been drawn to perfection by communist regimes

Central European Planning culture and its competitiveness have been in the spotlight of many research activities, mostly externalized under Spa-ce.net, a network of CEE spatial planning universities and research institutions. Experiences from Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia showed striking similarities and common characteristics of national/regional/local planning cultures in various situations and contexts. Planning systems, planning tradition, formal and informal instruments of planning and general perception of spatial planning differ in the above-mentioned countries in rather marginal fields. What is common is the similar conceptual nature of the planning process as well as the repertoire of planning practice.

According to the outputs from the above-mentioned activities, the essential characteristics of Central European planning culture might be depicted accordingly (Jaššo, Finka 2019):

- large time horizons of the planning executive and decision-making

Central European planning culture was always considered to be rather adaptive, evolutional, and even bureaucratic. The planning process has many steps and time frames that are difficult to skip, accelerate, or modify. Planning as a professional activity has always been perceived to be one of the pillars of continuity and stability in society. The heritage of the rational predictive planning models of the 20th century, as well as post-communist political implications, play a major role here. Planning bureaucracy highlights this characteristic. From the point of view of regional competitiveness, this feature of Central European planning culture might be perceived in both ways: its negative impact on the speed of the planning process might be a hindrance, but its legibility and certain carefulness keeps rationality in the system, making it more predictable in uncertain and fuzzy situations.

- important role of social aspects and social cohesion in planning

Countries in Central Europe were always rather egalitarian compared to Anglo-Saxon or Asian countries. Thus, planning was never a "purely physical" process; rather, it aspired more to the role of the stabilizer of society. Central European countries are displaying lower social and professional mobility and higher aversion to risk-taking initiatives and behavioural patterns. Transformation in the 1990s in post-communist societies introduced neoliberal models not only in the economy but also in spatial development. This threatened vulnerable social groups and probably contributed to spatial polarization in several dimensions. Regional and spatial disparities are still present and are one of the main challenges of spatial development even in the 21st century.

- growing general vulnerability of spatial/social systems

Recent years exposed the growing vulnerability of spatial and social systems in Central Europe. Increasing pressure from the international market, negative demographic trends, inflation and debt crisis, and the threatening geopolitical situation took its toll on society. Social instability and deteriorating social cohesion became one of the most threatening factors. We are witnesses to a continuous sense of alienation in the entire society, increasing anxiety and mistrust, as well as the loss of regional identity or dysfunctional social networks. Lowering mutual trust directly influences the efficiency of planning culture and makes it less competitive due to the slowdown of processes, lower participation and lower commitment of the participating actors, and lower efficiency of feedback mechanisms.

- considerable methodical depth but lack of interdisciplinarity

Planning in Central Europe always relied more on data than on people. Processes of classification, segmentation and evaluation were the hallmarks of planning in Central Europe, sidelining the participation, discourse and stories. This has only slightly changed with the introduction of participative planning. Cooperation of planning with other relevant disciplines, other sources of knowledge, or other discourses was always mediocre, making Central European planning culture a semi-closed system that was shy of new innovations and new relevant practices from abroad. Normative and regulatory planning culture was modified by participation but still stays deeply rooted in many mindsets.

- rather indifferent/sceptical attitude of the public toward the planning profession

The planner's role has been significantly modified in Central Europe, but public confidence, trust and a general sense of cooperation from the public remain limited. Stakeholders from minor groups are still marginalized and sidelined in many cases. In the former socialist countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland), considerable distrust of the public is the heritage of the late modernity under socialism (1970s - 80s) when alienation and helplessness were the dominant emotions in public discourse (see Jaššo, Finka, 2019). General lack of leadership, the politicization of the planning process, and clan culture in many small municipalities sometimes reduce planning to pure technical externalization of political decisions. In order to increase the competitiveness of planning culture, it is necessary to raise the public commitment involvement of the local actors and to strengthen the inner cohesion of the communities which are participating in the planning process.

Conclusions and a Possible Research Agenda

Planning culture is one of the softest and most delicate elements of spatial development, interacting with many variables within the entire society. It is a product of the long-term development of society, and its roots are deeply embedded in the collective behavioural patterns, values, and underlying assumptions of large cultural milieus that define its nature and character. Planning culture is always an intersection of many societal driving forces and is always contextual and only partly measurable. There is no optimal planning culture, but we can compare different planning cultures, their impacts on smooth and sustainable spatial development, their interactions, and results. Each shift, modification or change in planning culture is evolutional and might be observed and assessed in broader temporal and spatial horizons.

Planning culture always arises on the interface between specific/unique versus universal. All the planning processes reflect society's interactions with the social and physical environment and are deeply embedded in the social practices of a given society. Planning culture influences the competitiveness of the city, region, and entire society in many different aspects and dimensions. A legible, highly profiled, and proven planning culture delivers a framework for explaining planning processes and represents the values behind them. It secures the commitment, motivation and readiness to action of actors participating in the planning process, offering a common denominator for sharing the vision of the future.

Regional competitiveness of any given city, region, state or any other territorial subject depends not only on quantitative and directly measurable data (for instance, age and education structure, unemployment rate, GDP) but is strongly related to several multidimensional phenomena generated by social milieu and enabling and facilitating

many processes of overall development. Factors like degree of individual initiative, risk-taking behaviour, leadership, degree of control and restrictions, identification with profession, management of conflicts or communication patterns highly influence not only processes on the corporate level but create a robust base for evaluation of planning processes on the territorial level. Public perception of spatial planning and spatial planners, the role of the planners in society, and the level of their managerial, professional, and societal competencies and skills are other crucial factors in this field.

As one of the most important and vital sub-cultures in the family of European planning cultures, Central European planning culture is especially important in this discussion. The regional competitiveness of this culture contributes significantly to the competitiveness of the whole Central European region. Positive contributing factors like methodological depth of planning process, dense interlinkage of planning and social processes running in the society, as well as deep professional background and long tradition, make Central European planning culture an undeniable asset of the whole microregion and proved to be an essential competitive advantage, especially on a global scale. On the other hand, some other problematic traits, like the indifferent/sceptical attitude of the public toward the spatial planning profession and lack of interdisciplinarity, present substantial hindrances in this regard.

We consider further managerial development of Central European (as well as local) planning culture to be of utmost importance regarding the latest trends, tendencies, and shifts in this field in (at least) the European dimension. Highly productive planning cultures have the potential to increase spatial quality and speed up the planning processes, as well as increase the overall societal understanding of planning dynamics, but they can also significantly contribute to the overall regional competitiveness of our cities, regions, or at the national level.

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