

# New planning formats in established settings: a reflection on advice and consultancy, inertia and failure in Luxembourg's planning practice

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## ABSTRACT

This practice review reflects on the role of planning innovations when confronted with established institutional settings. The case is that of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, whose government has in recent years sought to modernise the means of spatial planning, in which advice, consultation and citizen participation play a certain role. Two processes are critically examined: the revision of the country's main planning guideline and the pré-figuration of an international building exhibition in a cross-border area. The study concludes that planning innovations will only show their added value if established institutions of public policy and administration modernise themselves accordingly.

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## Introduction

Urban and spatial planning practice has expanded strategic and instrumental approaches in recent decades, when a proactive type of strategy emerged alongside the originally more adaptive or absorptive style of planning (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 63). In addition to the political and administrative implementation of planning laws and regulations, new conceptual approaches such as brownfield redevelopment, integrated development or the focus on large-scale urban projects gained momentum. Since the 1990s, the modernisation of spatial planning has been accompanied by the emergence of the collaborative planning paradigm (Healey, 1997). The emphasis on collaborative and communicative practices can be seen as one of the most significant innovations of, or within, the planning process. It relies heavily on the involvement of the general public and stakeholders (acting both partially and in the common interest), but it also sheds light on the institutional frameworks through which plans and the normative ideas underlying them are articulated, politically decided and implemented. While collaborative planning highlighted the role of informal practices, recent planning innovations have embraced the idea of co-production and experimental planning, thus recognising citizens and stakeholders as planning agents. This also implies a new understanding of the role model of the planner (Fox-Rogers & Murphy, 2016).

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Planning innovations promise to increase the efficiency and acceptability of plans and their implementation (Darchen & Searle, 2018). This is important in terms of how key audiences and stakeholders perceive a plan and given the need for buy-in between the different levels of policymaking involved. With this kind of consent planning can be made more effective. The search for better impact also stems from a growing recognition that planning faces major constraints and obstacles, notably development pressures and the power of commercial interests, represented by investment actors and powerful alliances, for example in local growth machine constellations (Vigar *et al.*, 2020). Common goals such as sustainable development, affordable housing or urban equity seem difficult to pursue against these powerful interests.

While it is impossible to make a fair judgement on whether and to what extent planning innovations can deliver on the promise of modernisation that they imply, we can observe several attempts by planning bodies to improve their impact. This also applies to the subject of this review: recent planning practice in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, whose economy and population have grown significantly in close association with its neighbouring states. Luxembourg's development and planning system is relatively young, having been effectively established only in the 2000s (ARL-International, 2022). In practice, it is known to be rather bureaucratic and over-regulated; complaints about excessively long and complex 'procedures' are shared by actors across the political spectrum. Not least in order to improve its effectiveness and adapt to challenges such as growth management or climate change, spatial planning has recently adopted a number of new planning formats. These can be understood as both procedural, designed to complement traditional formalised planning frameworks (i.e. the legal and politico-administrative handling of planning issues), and substantive, in the sense that they bring to the fore new means and instruments of planning hitherto unknown to the country (Hesse, 2015).

The cases discussed in this review include the renewal of a major state planning framework through process innovation, in particular public and expert consultation, which led to the relaunch of the government's spatial planning steering programme (PDAT, DATer, 2023); and the implementation of a pre-figuration phase for an International Building Exhibition (in the following called pré-IBA) in the Franco-Luxembourg cross-border area, which would inject fresh blood into the regeneration process of this old industrial region (GECT, 2022). Both examples studied here are different in scope and scale, but they have in common that they add a more collaborative appeal to the existing, rather formalised practice of the authorities; secondly, they involve temporary events or activities, often seen as laboratories for exploring unknown futures. Thirdly, the two examples can be seen as cases of policy mobilities: the new PDAT is a conceptual device whose knowledge base – advice and guidance – comes, at least in part, from foreign sources. The planning instrument of an IBA is based on an originally German planning and architectural tradition (Fischer, 2020). The introduction of new approaches into practice was justified by specific developmental urgencies that challenge existing routines, especially as its application goes beyond traditional perspectives both in terms of time (future) and space (cross-border).

In addition to the two processes examined in more detail in this paper, other strategies have recently been developed in the country through consultation and advice, which also aim to innovate existing processes and structures. These include a blueprint study on

economic transition led by the US consultant Jeremy Rifkin on the ‘*Third Industrial Revolution*’ (published in 2016) and the international consultation process ‘*Luxembourg in Transition 2050*’, on behalf of the Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning (various reports published in 2022). Elements of these two processes were mentioned by the PDAT, and both the PDAT and the pré-IBA referred to ‘*Luxembourg in Transition 2050*’, which also addresses spatial development and planning issues. The most recent example of strategizing is the attempt to define a ‘*Luxembourg Strategy 2050 (Eco 2050)*’, launched by the Ministry of Economy, which contains some notion of spatial development and planning as well. While none of these processes has been integrated with each other (which would have made sense given the size of the country), the PDAT does not effectively or systematically integrate these elements. Rather, it is eclectic in that it brings together different sources from different processes into an overarching narrative without making this coherent.

Against this background, this review of practice addresses two sets of questions with regard to PDAT and pré-IBA: To what extent have the new planning tools been put into practice and how have they intersected with existing routines and requirements? What has been achieved so far and what is the expected impact on the development of Luxembourg? This review is inspired by the methodology of plan evaluation and review (Oliveira & Pinho, 2010), although it does not claim to provide a full assessment, which would only be possible years after implementation. The main sources of the paper are twofold: firstly, a number of official documents, meeting minutes and notes were analyzed in order to trace the processes involved and their outcomes. Second, the author participated in the two planning and policy processes as an observer from a medium distance. In other words, although he was not in charge or a major actor in the two processes, he was close enough to obtain first-hand information at various stages. As a member of the government advisory body on spatial planning CSAT (Conseil supérieure en aménagement du territoire), he participated in topical debates and independently commented on drafts of the PDAT. He was also one of several members of the University of Luxembourg who participated in meetings and debates of the pré-IBA bodies. These insights on both processes benefit from a long-term research path on the country’s development and planning constellations (Hesse, 2013, 2016; Hesse & Wong, 2020).

## **Luxembourg and the cross-border territory of the ‘Greater Region’**

Over the past few decades, the European Union’s second smallest member state has made a remarkable transition from a steel-producing country to the seat of European institutions and one of Europe’s top 10 financial markets. Its population and employment have grown rapidly (almost doubling since the 1980s), and its economic performance, as measured by GDP, ranks it among the wealthiest nations. Most of these changes have been driven by the successful internationalisation of the country’s economy, and the foreign-born population has reached almost 50% nationally and more than 70% in the capital (ARL-International, 2022). It is not only the extraordinary trajectory of strong growth that has put pressure on land, infrastructure and the environment. It is the peculiar characteristic of the country as small but global that places it in a structural contradiction between constant development pressure on the one hand and the lack of

resources to manage this dynamic (be it land, infrastructure or institutional capacity) on the other. However, in the liberal politico-economic environment, development has traditionally taken precedence over planning (especially its regulatory concept), and related frameworks and practices have only recently been established. Even though employment in the public sector is not considered low, planning capacities are particularly scarce at the municipal level, where a majority of small communes effectively have very few staff involved in the planning and building practice. Given the time lag between the development of land, infrastructure or housing and the observation of impacts, delays are still noticeable today. It is a rather complex planning environment that poses significant challenges to planning practice and institutions (Hesse, 2015).

Other challenges are caused by the high degree of interconnectedness of Luxembourg with its neighbouring regions, where planning needs are confronted with the vacuum of cross-border policy, planning and administration. While planning scholars are familiar with these phenomena from the debate of the city-region, such problems are exacerbated in cross-border areas with their own legal, political or administrative peculiarities (Decoville & Durand, 2021). Luxembourg has experienced steady economic and demographic growth since the 1970s, whereas Lorraine, like northern France in general, is much less favoured demographically and economically. As a result of this disparity, more than 100,000 workers commute from France to Luxembourg every working day, a good half of all cross-border commuters to the Grand Duchy. This number has more than quadrupled between 1991 and 2021. In the opposite direction is the residential mobility of Luxembourgers, who have moved to areas close to the border since the early 2000s as house prices have risen, with more than 13,000 people having moved by 2022 (IBA/OIE, 2023).

The key components and contradictions of development and planning practice in Luxembourg and the Greater Region are documented elsewhere (Hesse, 2016). In order to properly assess the potential reach of process innovations, it is essential to recall some crucial features of the planning system. These include the two-tier system of state and municipal decision-making, where there is no regional planning, and the strong role of mayors and municipal councils in making binding decisions on land use and zoning. In fact, the two most important interfaces in this setting – the one between the state and the municipalities and the case of inter-municipal cooperation – mark a gap in terms of robust instruments. In addition, around 90% of developable land within planning perimeters is privately owned (LISER, 2023). Apart from new ideas on content or procedures, any real planning innovation would have to be judged on its impact on these factors.

## New formats for addressing old questions

### *Programme directeur en aménagement du territoire (PDAT)*

In the mid-2010s, the Luxembourg government began work on a new version of the *Programme directeur de l'aménagement du territoire* (PDAT), the country's main spatial planning guideline. An update of the government's territorial development and planning policy was overdue, as the previous policy (DATer, 2003) was considered outdated. Together with the informal accompanying strategy IVL (DATer, 2004), the programme

and its application were not sufficient to limit the high development pressure and to bring order to the territory, which were and still are the main objectives of spatial policy. In line with the increase in population, employment and the production of office space (which caters to the country's important service industries), land consumption had increased significantly, as had the cost of land and housing. Due to the regional labour market, mobility and transport issues also became critical. A new planning guideline for the Grand Duchy would therefore have benefited greatly from an integrated perspective on places and flows.

The timeline for establishing a new framework effectively starts in the mid-2010s and includes various milestones, from the development of three scenarios ('laissez faire', 'rigid', 'harmonious') in 2016 to the opening of a public consultation process in 2017/2018 and a recalibration of the process in 2020. After almost eight years of internal preparation and amendment, public debate, consultation, legislative negotiations and decision-making, the new PDAT was officially adopted by the government on 21 June 2023. Its thematic cornerstones are a central place-based development layout (including three growth poles and a number of development centres designed as its backbone); future population and settlement growth should be directed exactly to these activity poles; urban areas should be further densified; spatial planning claims to be the coordinating unit of all relevant space-consuming activities (DATer, 2023, pp. 40ff). These elements are more or less taken over from the 2003 framework; climate change-related ambitions are new to the Spatial Programme, implying that net land consumption should be reduced to zero by 2050 (DATer, 2023, p. 76).

The PDAT takes a legalistic approach as an umbrella guideline that claims to have a steering effect. However, the problem remains that the binding power to draw up plans and issue building permits lies exclusively with the municipalities and not with the state. This is true even taking into account the complex process of approval of local plans by the Ministry of the Interior. This Ministry's conformity and compatibility assessment is more or less confined to legal requirements, which does not fully reflect upon the many dimensions of plan content and planning processes that are not legally defined – for example, when it comes to 'soft' measures such as strategic planning or the need to balance different demands, not to mention informal practices at all levels. Secondly, the relationship between the PDAT as an overarching development framework and the sectoral plans for transport, green space, industry and housing is problematic, as the latter were already in place while the former were still being prepared. As a result, there is still a lack of logical coherence between the two instruments and their productive interrelationship. In most general terms, the main means of achieving public and political acceptance, and thus impact, have been procedural, in particular through extensive public consultation and an internal advisory and consultation process based on input from foreign experts. 'Implementing the objectives and strategy of the PDAT means inventing and developing new tools, systems and working methods in the phase following the adoption of the PDAT' (DATer, 2023, p. 19, emphasis by author).

Procedurally, the new approach to participation was applied to an unusually wide range of actions, promoting spatial planning more actively than before. Laboratory-style meetings for interested members of the public were organised in all regions of the country, and workshops with experts were held to recommend useful strategies. However, the main results of these processes are only documented in general terms,

consisting of an aggregate list of points frequently mentioned during these meetings. Therefore, it remains unclear which part of the participatory results were considered at which stage of the process: either before or after the publication of the PDAT (see quote above). Although public participation is now common practice in the Grand Duchy, the decision-making mechanisms are still not open, so a key question is to what extent the results of the consultations were included in the final product and thus bring about real changes in the authorities' agenda. In terms of specific consultation at government level, a working group of planning experts from Switzerland has been working on the dossier. This has led to some interesting comparative reflections on planning in the two countries, which have at times been discussed with CSAT. However, it remains unclear to what extent the strikingly different contexts between the two countries and their planning systems allow useful conclusions to be drawn from this comparison. In addition to the different historical backgrounds (planning traditions) and legal frameworks of the two countries, research on policy transfer/policy mobilities has shown that cherry-picking practices are confronted with barriers that are exposed by structural (legal, political, procedural) norms, requirements and practices. Switzerland, although a comparatively small but wealthy state, is far ahead of Luxembourg in all planning aspects. It is unlikely that the Grand Duchy will be able to catch up in the foreseeable future.

The new PDAT was intended to determine the future direction of spatial development across the country. However, this future was rather narrowly conceived: although two different time horizons were chosen (2035 and 2050), the apparently alternative scenarios were in fact quite close to each other (DATer, 2023, pp. 47ff). According to the government's Spatial Planning Advisory Council (CSAT), demographic and socio-economic growth is taken for granted: '(...) the scenarios tend in principle in one and only one direction, the only difference being gravity. What is missing, therefore, is the description and organisation of the PDAT around an optimal, desirable scenario that can present the most appropriate concrete possibilities for facing current and future challenges, for avoiding and preventing avoidable challenges' (CSAT, 2023, p. 5, own translation). The Council therefore recommends '... to reconsider this chosen development scenario for the country, which does not seem to be adapted to the situation of Luxembourg and the objectives sought by the PDAT 2023' (CSAT, 2023). Given the lack of alternative future paths envisaged here, it can be argued that the framework remains inconsistent.

Another critical factor is the overemphasis on goals and objectives as opposed to concrete strategy and implementation. While the overarching strategic principles are broken down into recommendations for all sub-regions of the country (10 activity areas and seven functional zones), little is said about the concrete means that will bring specific spatial development goals to life. Probably the most difficult measure initially proposed in the draft PDAT was the introduction of tradable development rights, which was rejected by the Government Council. It can therefore be argued that this framework, with its non-binding nature, faces the same unresolved property issue as its predecessor. Moreover, institutional constraints and inertia remain unresolved at two ends: vertical (state-municipality) and horizontal (intermunicipal). The PDAT also addresses cross-border issues, which are key to the country's economic development (DATer, 2023, p. 86). They are included at both the level of the Greater Region as a whole and as concerns the specific cross-border functional area between France and Luxembourg.

However, it does not include concrete proposals for the development of a regional approach and a cross-border strategy, and thus will not fill the cross-border planning gap relevant to the region (Decoville & Durand, 2017). Moreover, it needs to be considered that the international political environment is extremely complex.

In the most general terms, the implications of the new planning framework for governance are not explained in sufficient detail. They appear in the main document of the PDAT, but the actual content remains brief and extremely general. The same is true of the underlying constitutional dimensions of land scarcity and the fact that the lion's share of developable land is in private hands, land reserves are subject to speculation, and the political interests of landowners are quite powerful (Paccoud *et al.*, 2022). This problem is mentioned only briefly in the PDAT, almost anxiously, at the end of the document: 'Today, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is facing a situation comparable to that of Switzerland in the same period (limited territory, rising land prices, demographic growth, urbanisation on agricultural land, etc.), to which are added new challenges linked to the climatic and environmental context. Consequently, sooner or later the question of enshrining spatial planning or some of its principles in the Constitution will inevitably arise' (DATer, 2023, p. 137; own translation). With this short section, the PDAT mentions an important problem – but does not provide any explanation as to why exactly this is a problem and what precisely should be done to resolve the related conflicts.

### **International Building Exhibition (pré-IBA) Alzette Belval**

The so-called Mission de Préfiguration of the International Building Exhibition Alzette Belval (pré-IBA) was officially launched at the University of Luxembourg in January 2020 as a two-year preparatory phase to explore the potentials of an IBA for the Franco-Luxembourg border region. This area includes the Alzette Belval agglomeration with 12 municipalities (eight on the French side of the border, four on the Luxembourg side), with a population of almost 100,000 inhabitants on an area of 170 square kilometres. This is a relatively small area, even by the standards of previous IBA projects. The mission was initiated by the governments of the two countries together with the University of Luxembourg and managed by the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), an official institutional body set up by the two governments and funded by the European Union. The three partners financed this first preparatory phase. The pré-IBA was coordinated by a Steering Group and overseen by two standing committees at technical and political level, as well as an International Scientific Advisory Board moderated by the University.

The content of the work was based on extensive field surveys, consultations with mayors and thematic workshops, both carried out by staff from the coordinating unit (GECT) and the university team. The starting point is the industrial heritage of the region, also known as 'Minett' in Luxembourgish, which has left many large brownfield sites that are now attractive for development. The aim was to address the complex situation of interdependence, with its spatially uneven development and latent problems ('urgencies') in terms of mobility, environment, housing and settlement, through a deliberately temporary approach. The main findings of the various levels of investigation were summarised in two documents, a 'Memorandum' published on behalf of the

Scientific Advisory Board (Hesse & Peleman, 2021) and a document entitled ‘The Foundations’ (GECT, 2022) published by the government authorities. At the operational level of the staffed units of the GECT and the UL, various reports were published on the more detailed results of the empirical and design work.

In an attempt to create a seedbed of ideas, both governments were determined to set out the implementation of individual projects. Unfortunately, strategic issues were barely included, nor were different variants of possible futures. As a result, there was no concrete link between the utopian element – which would be offered by spaces for experimentation and a ‘state of emergency’ – and instructions for the near future. Ideas for innovative regulation and governance, in particular the institutional requirements for enabling more substantial changes, were largely excluded from the debate. It is obvious that political and administrative actors on both sides have struggled for two years to formulate a convincing idea of a) what the key problems of the region are, and b) what the specific contribution of an IBA might be. As a result, the experiment of launching a preliminary phase of the IBA was terminated at the end of 2022. The announcement of this decision by a local official read as follows:

More than two years of reflection, production, meetings and exchanges have enabled us to present the results and discuss possible next steps. But the challenge of working together towards a more sustainable and resilient future for the cross-border conurbation is great. In order to carry out this ambitious project for the benefit of the territory, but above all for its inhabitants, the geometry of the project must correspond precisely to the expectations, needs and resources of the territory and the local actors. As a result, the meeting ultimately decided not to launch an IBA, or even an in-depth phase as envisaged in ‘The Foundations’. However, the desire to continue with the exchanges, partnerships and directions proposed in the Prefiguration remains strong. In order to envisage a follow-up, the group will need to be strengthened with the support of INTERREG. (GECT, 2023, p. 13; own translation)

It appears that in this border region the planning activities were carried out informally, but the results should remain under the control of the decision-makers, in particular the state on both sides. In this respect, the pré-IBA experiment has shown that, despite the strong institutional stratification on the French side (‘mille-feuille’), two highly centralised systems operate in this region. In fact, the power of the centres predominates, calling into question cross-border practices even before the pré-IBA experiment had a chance to unfold (cf. Becker & Hesse, 2021). Any questions concerning the institutional dimension of planning were also kept out of the pré-IBA agenda. As a result, planning remained technical in nature, and the scope of related discourses was kept rather narrow – for example, housing production as one pillar of a possible pré-IBA agenda was proposed to be left to state-controlled agencies on both sides of the border. The question of land which is essential for Luxembourg – given its physical, economic and institutional scarcities – was barely addressed. To bring the temporary moment to the fore, it would have been necessary to shift the strategic authority in planning and development from the central state to the cross-border area and to activate an open, reflexive planning culture. In retrospect, it could be argued that the planning systems and their main actors were not yet ready for the experiment, not least due to different mindsets on both sides and a primarily



instrumental approach to planning that were among the main factors of failure here. This applies to both local and national actors. In conclusion, it could be argued that it was too early to approach the state of emergency in an environment where planning is immature rather than adapting to innovation.

### **Process innovation and temporary formats in practice: lessons learned from inertia and failure**

Can the objectives, measures and instruments outlined by the above process innovations contribute to the overall commitment of spatial planning to bring order to the territory, to make land use more efficient and to prepare for an uncertain future? Two main criteria may help to answer these questions in relation to the two cases presented above: a) consistency – are the measures proposed by the processes appropriate and consistent to address the country's main development problems? And b) implementation – are they likely to be used in practice and thus have a real impact? It should be noted that the two processes analyzed here are different in scale, scope and function. However, they conclude a longer period of modernisation in which the government and its partners (private, public, national, foreign) aim to revitalise the planning system and thus prepare for change. The two processes are equally indicative of how innovation is justified and how new means of strategic planning are introduced.

In the case of the PDAT, the catalogue of strategies and measures designed to heal the country's fragmented urbanisation landscape seems appropriate only at first glance. The central place-based general design and the promotion of higher densities are identical to most of what was presented in the 2003 version of the programme. Why should the strategies be appropriate now, when they have already proved inadequate in previous decades? There is one new aspect in the framework, namely the goal of reducing land use to net zero by 2050. This seems as ambitious as it is unlikely to be achieved under the current circumstances: Given the primacy of development over planning in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, this target is so inconsistent with Luxembourg's actual development trajectory that, to be taken seriously, it would require radically different policies and practices even in the short term. Setting such a target may be justified in the light of wider policy objectives (such as those articulated by the EU), but it would inevitably widen the unhealthy gap between ambition and delivery to which the country's planning practice is already prone.

As far as practice is concerned, it remains unclear whether there is even a chance of achieving a certain level of implementation. This would require a more in-depth, plausible and critical analysis of the related gaps and shortcomings of previous plans and current practice, which is still lacking. The PDAT also avoids discussing the constraints imposed by the country's political economy and its dependence on growth: Spatial planning still falls prey to current forecasts and projections that would ensure the prosperity of the financial market and the service orientation of the economy. There is little left in terms of openness and alternatives, but rather a political-economic strait-jacket (ensuring further economic growth) that keeps the discourse on conventional paths. Without taking into account both the past and the specific context, and without discussing truly alternative futures, it is difficult to expect major changes in planning.

In the case of the pré-IBA Alzette Belval, the answer to the above questions is, for the time being, a clear no: Apart from a general learning effect, no implementation is envisaged, and the experiment therefore lacks practical relevance. Getting the most out of temporary formats would require a) openness and curiosity, a willingness to embrace the unusual, and b) a reduction in the representational, branding and PR value of such ventures. A related advance would be to address the key issues at stake: land and property, institutional frameworks, mindsets, governmentality. Path-dependency plays an enormous role, as does the institutional and economic context. It was even difficult to agree on what the problem actually was and how to properly define what was needed in normative terms. As a result, the pré-IBA process was confronted with inertia and structural blockages rather than innovative planning, which limits the creativity of the process. Approaching planning as a purely technical endeavour also limits any chance of advancing planning as an essentially normative activity, which faces particular challenges in cross-border contexts (Decoville & Durand, 2017; Durand & Decoville, 2018).

The role played by consultancy and organized advocacy in the cases presented here is also reminiscent of the requirements for successful policy mobility, that is, the importation of ideas from elsewhere and their application in a different, distinctive setting (Cook, 2015). It is widely acknowledged that the mechanisms of so-called 'transfer' are complex and that the conditions for successful practice are rarely adequately reflected. This is true for the very specificity of small but global, more rural than urban Luxembourg, which does not lend itself easily to the importation of urbanisation and densification policies from elsewhere. Moreover, while the partners involved tend to seek success and speak only of positive results, they are reluctant to admit failures or constraints. This problem, which is inherent, for example, in the pré-IBAs' ambition to promote a kind of 'showcase urbanism', represents a missed opportunity in terms of learning outcomes and public awareness. Usually, an IBA represents an experiment that seeks to develop and operate specific spaces of demonstration and imagination (cf. Kunzmann, 2011, pp. 177/78) through which issues of geography, planning and development can be brought to the attention of a wider audience.

Both the new PDAT and the pré-IBA can be seen as being in line with current discourses that have easily and elegantly adopted the notion of change, transition and transformation. At the same time, they lack coherence and the necessary emphasis on robust implementation by failing to address key conflicts and present options for resolution. First, there is little effective inter-municipal coordination because the small country has no regional planning level; voluntary agreements on selected parts of the development process have not yet filled this gap. Second, there is an urgent need for better coordination in the vertical system of decision-making, where the state and municipalities need to interact more efficiently. The related lack of significant progress is both due to the socio-economic framework conditions of planning and also the priorities set in the political arenas. Third, there is an apparent increase in participatory practices in planning (local, national, cross-border), while it remains completely unclear whether and to what extent citizens' voices can effectively determine the political process. At least in the depoliticised environment of Luxembourg, consultation by the authorities is probably more for tactical reasons than a serious commitment to public participation that is considered to have a real-world impact (see Purcell, 2009). In this context,

planning can be seen as a mere ‘technology of hope’ (Inch *et al.*, 2023), rather than a means of robust conflict management.

What would be a useful counterstrategy that gives planning a better sense of consistency and effectiveness? A reflective approach to planning would be appropriate that combines proper analysis of the problem on the one hand (rather than starting the discourse with apparent solutions) with rethinking mid- and long-term strategies on the other. It seems essential to include in this reflection, rather than exclude, general framework conditions such as the political economy of the country, or the individualistic mindset of the society. A stronger orientation towards common goods and public value would be key to planning innovation (Vigar *et al.*, 2020). In terms of procedures, the increasing call for civic participation would only make sense when, first, the subject matter is clearly defined and delineated; it may reasonably work for projects rather than comprehensive plans and philosophies such as a PDAT. Second, the precise ways in which the results from new planning tools influence decision making (or not, and why) need to be made fully transparent. This requires a strong link to establish between new means and ‘old’ structures, which may further change not only the role and the (self-)reflection of the planner, but also include the practices and organisation of public policy and administration.

Changes in the government constellations may determine and possibly delimit the future potentials for such a reflective position to gain momentum. In Luxembourg, a new coalition of conservatives and liberals took over the governing power in Fall 2023, led by two parties that are not known to support a pro-active role of spatial planning. Uncertainty remains as to politics in neighbouring France: Lorraine belongs to what is already considered ‘places left behind’. Not only are these regions facing economic decline or stagnation, but they are also experiencing right-wing populism and related voting patterns, which may continue to grow. On either side of the border, there is no strong political agenda in favour of spatial planning to see at this point. It seems that the challenges to be met by planning are becoming ever broader, more complex and more politically contentious, while the means to meet them have yet to be found – whether based on formal and conventional planning approaches or on informal, temporal and participatory means and methods.

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