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Spatial planning (*Raumordnung*)



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This article starts by discussing the term *spatial planning* and describing its organisation on the various levels (European, federal, state and regional level) and their most important instruments. The change in the understanding of the coordination of spatial planning will then be discussed in detail. Finally, it will address the current key themes in spatial planning and the contributions of spatial planning research.

1 Term, functions, and the history of spatial planning

The term *spatial planning* (*Raumordnung*) can be descriptively related to the given structuring of (▷ *Space*). However, it is more commonly used for the normative concepts of organising and developing space and the processes necessary to that end, and the associated institutions (legal regulations, organisations, instruments/procedures). Experts generally understand the term *spatial planning* to mean the spatial planning undertaken by competent authorities, especially ▷ *Federal spatial planning* (*Bundesraumordnung*). In the overall system of ▷ *Spatial planning* (*Raumplanung*), the term *spatial planning* (*Raumordnung*) in Germany encompasses all cross-sectionally oriented planning levels and instruments above the municipal level (▷ *Urban planning*; ▷ *Urban land-use planning*): thus the European level, the federal level, and the levels of the federal states and regions. But in other countries, such as Austria, the term refers to the municipal level. In a narrower sense, the term *spatial planning* (*Raumordnung*) addresses the organisation of both physical and social space, while the term ▷ *Spatial development* (*Raumentwicklung*) includes all policies with a direct or indirect relevance for space.

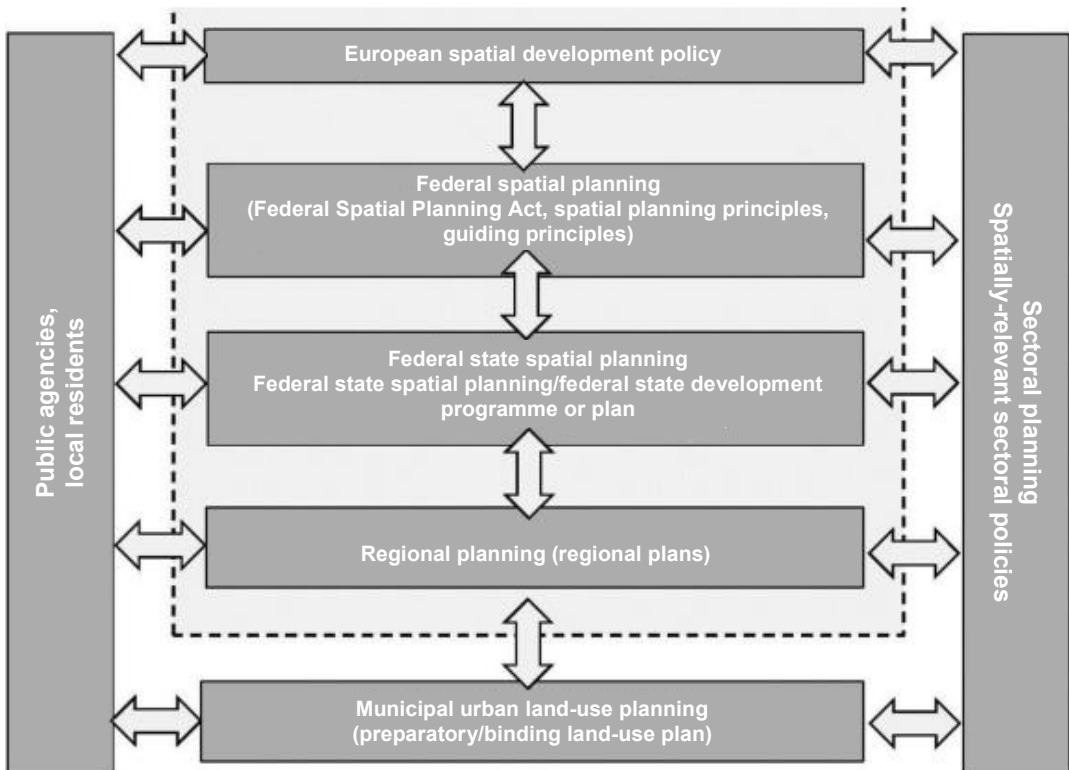
Spatial planning fulfils basic organising, developing, balancing, and protective functions. Its primary task is the organising function: ensuring a well-ordered spatial structure. As part of spatial development policies, spatial planning is always caught between a development function and a balancing function, because the development of subareas can also be detrimental to the balancing function. Protective functions are primarily guaranteed through sectoral planning (e.g. ▷ *Nature conservation*, water conservation); spatial planning, however, must take on these protective concerns in its plans and include them in the ▷ *Weighing of interests*.

The ▷ *History of spatial planning* (*Raumordnung*) in Germany extends back almost 100 years. The term *spatial planning* was first used in the 1920s when the first regional planning associations emerged. In the National Socialist period, spatial planning was centralised, nationally conceived, and was increasingly compulsory; however, it remained weak compared to sectoral planning such as, above all, transport planning. After the Second World War, the federal states initially built up their spatial planning systems gradually. The Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Raumordnungsgesetz*, *ROG*) in 1965 brought about a certain nationwide standardisation across the Federal Republic of Germany, although it mostly left the responsibility for spatial planning to the federal states. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), centralised, nationwide spatial planning was established through territorial district planning. After 1990, spatial planning was gradually established in the new federal states, based on the West German model. At the beginning of the 2000s, this process was concluded in all federal states insofar as ▷ *Regional planning* was also permanently institutionalised everywhere in addition to the federal state spatial planning (▷ *Federal state spatial planning*, *federal state development*).

2 The organisation of spatial planning

Figure 1 illustrates the position of spatial planning within the overall planning system.

Figure 1: Levels of spatial planning within the overall planning system



Source: The author

There is no institutionalised European spatial planning in the German sense. Spatial planning issues are selectively coordinated by the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning. The coordination platforms such as CEMAT (Conférence Européenne des Ministres de l'Aménagement du Territoire) or the strategic cross-sectional approaches, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP; European Commission 1999) and the Territorial Agenda 2020, are less oriented toward spatial planning, and more toward spatial development (▷ *European spatial development policy*; ▷ *Territorial cohesion*; ▷ *European regional policy*). Large-scale requirements for the content and instruments of specific spatially-relevant planning are formulated at the European level, especially on a sectoral basis: in addition to regional policies, environmental topics (Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Natura 2000 areas) and transport planning (trans-European networks) are prime examples. In the border areas, however, neighbouring countries or regions (and to an extent, cross-border associations) coordinate spatially-relevant planning on a more concrete level. Another important instrument for strengthening cross-national cooperation on spatial planning topics is the INTERREG/ETC programme (▷ *Cooperation, cross-border*; ▷ *Cooperation, transnational*).

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In Germany, spatial planning is collaboratively pursued between the federal level, the state level, and the respective regions using the ▷ *Mutual feedback principle*, whereby the emphasis is on the federal state and regional levels in the form of legally binding spatial development plans and spatial planning processes ▷ *Spatial impact assessment procedure (Raumordnungsverfahren)*. During the Federalism Reform I of 2006, the framework legislation under Article 75 of the Basic Law (*Grundgesetz, GG*) was eliminated and spatial planning became the object of concurrent legislative competence under Article 74(1) of the Basic Law (▷ *Constitutional framework of spatial planning (Raumplanung)*).

Overall, 83 organisational units in Germany are concerned with spatial planning in the narrow sense: there is federal spatial planning, 14 federal state planning departments, and 68 regional planning institutions. There are also small administrative units in the districts of Lower Saxony that take on the task of spatial planning (except for the regions of Hanover and Braunschweig). The sizes of these spatial planning units range from large state planning departments (e.g. Berlin-Brandenburg) to small subunits (regional planning in the districts of Lower Saxony).

The responsibility for federal spatial planning lies with the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure. In recent years, the Federal Government has made use of the option of creating cross-state location strategies for maritime and inland ports only through the spatial development plans for the Exclusive Economic Zone of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Besides these core legal tasks, federal spatial planning can primarily be seen as the responsibility for coordinating with the spatial planning policies of the ▷ *European Union (EU)* and initiating processes to develop guiding principles and innovative Model Projects for Spatial Planning, in order to set impetuses for new spatial planning problems in the federal states and regions.

Spatial planning in the federal states is allocated to individual departments within the ministries or state chancelleries, which vary from state to state: the function is most frequently allocated to the ministry of economics, the ministry of the interior, and the ministry of the environment. The only cross-state spatial planning authority is the joint state spatial planning of the federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg. In the other city states of Hamburg and Bremen, where there is no instrumental difference between federal state, regional, and preparatory land-use planning, separate units are responsible for spatial planning that work closely with the neighbouring states.

The most important committee for coordinating spatial planning between the Federal Government and the federal states (▷ *Cooperation between federal and state governments*) is the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning (*Ministerkonferenz für Raumordnung, MKRO*), which is anchored in section 26 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act (*Raumordnungsgesetz, ROG*). Its members are ministers on the federal and state level who are responsible for spatial planning. Decisions are primarily made in a main committee and prepared in the subcommittees (policy, traffic, law). Decisions and advisory opinions are the most important instruments of the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning. Since its establishment in 1967, the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning has passed over 200 resolutions.

Regional planning is organised differently in the federal states: The model that predominates is the model of regional associations composed of the local authorities. Schleswig-Holstein and Saarland have purely state regional planning, North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, and Bavaria have a mixed form of state and local authority regional planning, and in Lower Saxony the districts

are usually the regional planning authority. Depending on the organisation and scales of regional planning, there is a broad spectrum in how tasks are divided up between federal state and regional levels that has led to different planning solutions in almost every federal state. On certain central topics (airports in Berlin-Brandenburg and Frankfurt, but also raw materials in Lower Saxony), the federal state spatial planning authorities make more precise specifications in their plans, e.g. in Berlin-Brandenburg, Hesse, and Lower Saxony, which in other states only takes place on the regional planning level.

3 Instruments

Spatial planning in Germany is generally based on a differentiated catalogue of legal instruments (▷ *Instruments of spatial planning (Raumplanung)*; ▷ *Planning law*; ▷ *Spatial planning law (Raumordnungsrecht)*). With the Federal Spatial Planning Act of 1998, the task of spatial planning was formulated to not only coordinate but also implement spatial development plans, particularly through ▷ *Strategic planning* (in the form of regional development strategies, for example). Since then, the range of instruments available to spatial planning has been clearly differentiated at all levels.

3.1 Formal instruments

Under spatial planning law, the formal instruments of spatial planning are generally regulated in a standard way across the federation in the Federal Spatial Planning Act, but they are specified in federal state spatial planning acts and used above all on the regional level. A distinction can be made between:

- Processes to create spatial development plans with objectives and principles, and, starting with the regional level, priority areas, reserve areas, and suitable areas for development with Strategic Environmental Assessments. On the state level, spatial development plans are referred to in various ways: *federal state spatial development plan* has become rather rare; otherwise, they can be referred to as *state spatial planning programmes*, *state development plans*, or *state development programmes*. This also entails a gradual reorientation of spatial planning from an organising to a developing function. On the regional level, they are often referred to as *regional plans* or *regional spatial planning programmes*. With the amendment of the Federal Spatial Planning Act in 1998, the federation also introduced, by legal definition in section 3, the important systematic distinction between the objectives and principles of spatial planning (cf. Bartram 2012; ▷ *Objectives, principles and other requirements of spatial planning (Raumordnung)*). On maps, a distinction is sometimes made between a ▷ *Priority area, reserve area and suitable area for development*. This gives the state and regional planning authorities the opportunity to make their designations more systematic, classified according to the binding effects, or to structure processes to address those designations (especially procedures for derogating from spatial planning goals). The various courses of action available to spatial planning are expressed in the following categories: the objectives, or the priority areas and suitable areas for development, entail a high level of precision in the designations already carefully considered in the planning and correct implementation of the final decision made in the

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plan; and in the softer principles or reserve areas, on the other hand, aspects of sustainable spatial development in communication and weighing processes are to be included in the implementation of the plans.

- Spatial impact assessment procedures (section 15 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act) to coordinate individual space-related projects with the requirements of spatial planning (section 3 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act), possibly in accordance with spatial planning clauses in the sectoral planning laws. These precede the specific planning approval procedures (▷ *Planning approval*) which are the responsibility of the sectoral planning agencies. In recent years, spatial impact assessment procedures for thoroughfares and the associated locations (airports/train stations) have assumed great importance.
- Administrative procedures such as procedures for derogation from spatial planning objectives set forth in the spatial development plans (section 6 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act) and flanking instruments such as the prohibition of projects that run counter spatial planning (▷ *Prohibitions in spatial planning (Raumordnung)*) under section 14 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act.

A central procedural element, both in the creation of the spatial development plans and in the spatial impact assessment procedures, is the ▷ *Environmental assessment*.

Formal spatial planning primarily comprises coordination between public stakeholders in administration (public agencies) and – depending on the issue – interest groups (especially environmental organisations and economic agencies or organisations). The participation of the general public is also provided for through the Strategic Environmental Assessment under the respective EU Directive. The high degree of abstraction, the tender character and negative planning character of spatial development plans, and the state of project-oriented planning that is still mostly unspecific at the time that spatial planning is reviewed, often stand in the way of efficient, comprehensive ▷ *Public participation*.

3.2 Informal instruments

The informal instruments of spatial planning have a certain anchoring in spatial planning law, but are based mainly on steering resources like information and coordination, and, to a lesser extent, financial means. They have assumed much greater significance in recent years.

- The information and forecasting instruments of spatial planning play an important role. An extensive range of national instruments has been created, primarily on the federal level, with the ongoing spatial observation by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (*Bundesamtes für Bauwesen und Raumordnung*), the spatial planning report, and spatial planning forecasting, which is supplemented in some states preferably in the form of state spatial planning reports (▷ *Reports on urban and spatial development*; ▷ *Spatial observation*; ▷ *Monitoring*; ▷ *Forecasting*; ▷ *Future scenarios*).
- Project-related informal preliminary agreements between spatial planning authorities on the one hand and local authorities and project agencies on the other, which provide initial clarifications on the permissibility of projects, have assumed increasing importance.

- The ▷ *Guiding principles for spatial development*, first adopted by the federation together with the federal states in the Spatial Planning Policy Guidelines of 1993, adopted in a considerably modified form in 2005, and reinforced to a large extent in 2013, along with the Model Projects for Spatial Planning initiated for innovative topics, have provided significant impulses for spatial planning in the federal states and regions (cf. *BMBau* [Federal Building Ministry] 1993; *MKRO* 2006, 2013, 2016).
- In 1998, the foundation for ▷ *Informal planning* at the regional level and for regional development strategies in particular was laid by the Federal Spatial Planning Act. Since then – mainly forced by the state spatial planning function as well – these instruments have been deployed in many regions and sometimes equipped regional management units; they frequently find themselves at the interface between spatial planning and ▷ *Regional development*.

4 The coordinating duty of spatial planning over the course of time

The most important task of spatial planning is to coordinate land use demands as well as planning and measures affecting spatial structures; the latter can also include those that are not yet anchored in plans (Weick 2013). In this way, future conflicts in relation to space can be identified and prevented. Its task is to coordinate the economic, social, and ecological requirements that lead to a permanent, large-scale, balanced arrangement in the sense of sustainable spatial development (section 1(1) of the Federal Spatial Planning Act).

Coordination is fundamental in all policy areas. Compared to other policy areas, however, the coordinating activities of spatial planning are different in that the coordination task is territorial and not functional. Nevertheless, a series of other policy areas and sectoral planning (▷ *Spatially-relevant sectoral planning*) also have a ▷ *Spatial impact* that to an extent is even more considerable than that of spatial planning. Spatial planning and spatial development policies are implicitly or explicitly pursued by other ministries or departments as well, especially those for the environment, transport, and the economy, but also finance, educational, social, and health policies (▷ *Water management*; ▷ *Transport planning*; ▷ *Transport policy*; ▷ *Federal transport infrastructure planning*; ▷ *Educational infrastructure planning*; ▷ *Science policy*; ▷ *Housing policy*; ▷ *Fiscal equalisation at the level of local authorities*). The coordinating function of spatial planning takes place horizontally between the relevant authorities, as well as vertically between the various levels of spatial planning – mostly between federal state spatial planning and regional planning – and municipal planning.

Over the decades, the understanding of the coordination function of spatial planning – similar to the general understanding of state steering – has changed. It was evident that the extensive ambition for coordination in the 1960s and 1970s could not be fulfilled, which was mostly manifested in the far-reaching failure of the Federal Spatial Planning Programme of 1975. Coordination is hindered by competition between the territorial perspective of spatial planning and the functional perspective of sectoral planning, the vertical interlocking with the formative effect of certain decisions (on the upper level) compared with strategic long-term decisions (on the lower

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level), and the weakness of the legal instruments for spatial planning and the minimal resources it has at its disposal. In light of this, spatial planning in the 1980s regarded itself less in terms of comprehensive cross-sectional planning, but increasingly as a 'sectoral planning for space'. But this understanding of coordination was relativised to the extent that sectoral planning, such as transport planning or regional structural policy, developed differentiated spatial concepts and – unlike spatial planning – was able to realise them through operational implementation secured by investments. In some federal states and in relation to some issues, spatial planning clauses, which had required that sectoral planning be bindingly coordinated with spatial planning, were not consistently applied in policy. With the 'greening' of policy, institutionalised regional planning occupied itself with ▷ *Landscape planning* in the 1980s as a new active coordinating stakeholder, for which it could act only as a formal enforcement authority to some extent (▷ *Environmental planning*). The sectoral planning that required the protective function also became more weighty compared with spatial planning, since standardised EU regulations helped them gain clout while European spatial planning remained weakly anchored in the law (Fürst 2005). In the 1990s and 2000s, spatial planning became more defensive due to the regulatory orientation of its policy in light of the debates on globalisation and deregulation. Financially strong ministries and functional departments such as those of the economy and ▷ *Agriculture* increasingly discovered the regional level of action and formulated coordination requirements for implementation (▷ *Regional economic policy*).

With the Spatial Planning Policy Guidelines of 1993, the Framework for Action of 1995 that built on them, and the amendment of the Federal Spatial Planning Act, there was a gradual reorientation of how spatial planning action was understood. In addition to legally binding plans, guidelines, guiding principles, and research-based model projects were acknowledged as important instruments, primarily from federal spatial planning, to provide innovative impulses to current issues in the federal states and regions in the sense of discursive coordination (▷ *Incrementalism/perspective incrementalism*). The 'soft' instruments introduced in section 13 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act (1998), such as regional development strategies, territorial subarea reports, and city networks, particularly expanded regional planning's scope for action, both in creating and executing plans, to attain a transformation from coordination guided merely by regulatory policy to a cooperative form of coordination. It is true that regional planning is only one of many regional steering stakeholders in regional development. However, it is set apart by its mix of steering instruments, composed of 'hard' regulatory instruments and 'soft', informal instruments that focus on developmental aspects. With the guiding principles of federal spatial planning adopted in 2005, which were updated in 2013 (draft) although little was changed in their basic concepts, a new dimension of plasticity was reached. Therefore, spatial planning today takes the form of comprehensive planning, which now only selectively seeks to take primary responsibility for coordinating aspects affecting spatial structures, and instead strives to serve as a partner for all policies affecting spatial structures and thus makes its contribution to spatial development.

5 General principles, plan contents and current themes in spatial planning

The principles of spatial planning implicitly refer to almost all fundamental rights in the constitution (Articles 1-20 of the Basic Law) (▷ *Common good*). However, two principles are especially important for spatial planning:

- The principle of ▷ *Sustainability* was set forth in the amendment of the Federal Spatial Planning Act in 1998, which primarily corresponds to a general duty to weigh all ecological, economic, and social concerns from a more long-term perspective.
- The second important guiding principle is that of the ▷ *Equivalence of living conditions* in all parts of the country. The continual population decline in rural and peripheral regions, mostly in the eastern part of Germany but also in parts of the old Federal Republic of Germany, have led in recent years to fundamental debates on how implementable this guiding principle actually is. This principle has ultimately been upheld, but it is interpreted differently for a series of regions, e.g. in establishing reasonable minimum standards of basic services.

The additional principles formulated in section 2 of the Federal Spatial Planning Act, such as the balance and diversity of the overall space and its subareas, ensuring the ▷ *Provision of public services*, a competitive economy and infrastructure, maintaining and developing the ▷ *Cultural landscape*, the development of ecosystem functions, defence and civil protection interests, and cohesion and cooperation within the EU, can be expanded by federal state spatial planning acts.

The ▷ *Concepts of spatial planning (Raumordnung)* and the specific content of state and regional planning derived from them sometimes vary considerably, according to the spatial structure (metropolitan vs. rural areas) and problem areas, but also according to how each form of planning understands its role. Here the basic principles of the ‘lean plan’, which concentrates on the content it can significantly steer, are contrasted with the more broadly conceived and more strongly development-oriented plan, which formulates spatial planning concerns in all fields of action affecting spatial structures.

On the level of state planning, spatial categories are formulated and related to the individual subareas, such as regulated areas, structurally weak areas (▷ *Territorial categories*; ▷ *Rural areas*).

The traditional core area of spatial planning is the sustainable steering of the settlement structure (▷ *Settlement/settlement structure*) insofar as spatial planning functions here as quasi-sectoral planning and above all coordinates with the municipal level. The central places (▷ *Central place*) and the point-axial model for settlement structure have become even more important in light of challenges such as decarbonisation, although they are traditional categories of spatial planning. If restricting the use of land and curtailing ▷ *Suburbanisation* under the guiding principle of decentralised concentration were the core problems of spatial planning for decades, especially in the metropolitan areas, other developments have emerged in the form of shrinking cities and reurbanisation trends, at least in a few regions (▷ *Inner development*; ▷ *Polycentricity*; ▷ *Urban region*; ▷ *Relations between cities and surrounding regions*). The development of residential sites is stringently controlled to varying degrees in the spatial development plans of the individual federal states and regions. As far as steering the development of large-scale retail trade locations is concerned, spatial planning instruments have significantly improved in recent

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years, especially the concentration and congruence rule within spatial planning to strengthen the central-place theory and the agglomeration rules (▷ *Retail trade*; ▷ *Central public amenities*; ▷ *Agglomeration, agglomeration area*).

On the other side is the issue of conserving open spaces, whereby spatial planning functions mainly as a partner of landscape planning (whose preliminary work is implemented by spatial planning in appropriate categories); spatial planning incorporates information from landscape planning, but also considers it in the weighing of interests. The multifunctional categories such as regional green corridors have especially proven themselves here as an instrument of spatial planning in densely populated areas.

Within the framework of ▷ *Energy policy*, ▷ *Renewable energies* are emerging as an area in which spatial planning will be given greater responsibility in the future. In this context, in addition to working out regional energy strategies, securing locations for wind turbines is the chief central task that is taken on in most federal states on the level of regional planning.

Until the beginning of the last decade, spatial planning in the maritime area (▷ *Maritime spatial planning (Raumordnung)*) was a completely new issue. The considerable increase in plans to build offshore wind turbines and associated services exacerbated conflicts with other types of land use (especially nature conservation, raw materials, and maritime traffic). For the particularly important area of the German Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the North and Baltic Seas, federal spatial planning took on the task of coordinating the creation of spatial development plans, which were created by the Federal Maritime and Hydrographic Agency and adopted in 2009. For the area near the coast, the Federal State Development Plans of Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein set forth corresponding regulations that primarily related to the cable routes. At the same time, development strategies were formulated for the coastal area (▷ *Integrated coastal zone management*).

6 Spatial planning research

If one considers the number of spatial planning institutions and spatial plans in the context of the municipal level, it is clear that this level has been comparatively well examined in spatial research. In addition to the Academy for Territorial Development (*ARL*), there are the Leibniz Institutes for Research on Society and Space in Erkner (*IRS*), and of Ecological Urban and Regional Development in Dresden (*IÖR*), the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig (*IfL*) and the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development in Dortmund (*ILS*), as well as the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (*BBSR*) in Bonn. Through its action-oriented Model Projects for Spatial Planning, the BBSR has provided significant impulses for dealing innovatively with problems of spatial planning/spatial development at the regional level.

In recent years, basic research has been produced on a series of key spatial planning issues, such as adapting infrastructure to demographic change in connection with climate change, e.g. in issues such as ▷ *Vulnerability*, ▷ *Resilience/robustness*, ▷ *Risk management*. That research has also been transferred into practice, whereby model projects played a central role. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable need in Germany for research, especially on the issue of evaluating

and auditing spatial planning. Compared with regional and urban renewal policies that affect spatial structures and are mostly based on financial resources, spatial planning has been weakly evaluated and audited on all levels. However, the diversity of institutions and instruments on the regional level in particular offers a considerable range of possibilities for comparative research, which could also offer inspiration for planning practice.

7 Outlook

Although spatial planning, as a relatively abstract level within the comprehensive planning system, is not especially valued by policymakers and the public compared with other policy areas, and its steering effects are occasionally disputed – unjustly, as evaluations show (Jonas 2011; Zaspel 2011) – it has nonetheless proven to have institutional continuity. Over the years, the understanding of the role of spatial planning has changed: its regulatory approach has been supplemented by a developmental one. The increasingly unpopular notional adherence to administrative spatial boundaries and the stronger tendency towards a functional perspective will not make it structurally easier in the future for spatial planning to coordinate policy fields with a space-related approach. However, new issues are always emerging in the political agenda in which spatial planning is apparently needed; in recent years, for example, these have included the need to adapt the infrastructure to the situation in shrinking communities, the coordination of retail trade development, the energy transition (securing wind energy locations) or adapting to climate change (e.g. for preventive flood protection). Topics such as maritime spatial planning and spatial planning in relation to the subsoil (▷ *Spatial planning (Raumordnung) of subsoil*) ultimately illustrate that spatial planning must tap into not only new areas, but new spaces, which makes a common European spatial planning policy even more necessary.

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