



## Spatial Planning in the context of the Responsible Governance of Tenure

# What is Spatial Planning?

Text-only version

## In this lesson

Learning objectives .....	2
Introduction .....	2
The role of spatial planning .....	3
Key principles .....	4
Spatial planning functions.....	8
Summary .....	9

## Learning objectives

At the end of the lesson, learners should be able to:

- understand a definition of spatial planning;
- understand the key principles that define the scope of spatial planning.

## Introduction

This lesson will provide an overview of what spatial planning is. In particular, it will identify a general definition of this discipline and then it will examine the main principles on which spatial planning is founded and its fundamental functions.

Before arriving at a general definition of spatial planning, let's first consider a series of different aspects related to this discipline, as they are summarized in the questions below:



**To what other disciplines is spatial planning related?**

**Does spatial planning support sustainable development?**

**With which levels of decision-making is spatial planning concerned?**

*How would you answer these questions?*

We could answer as follows:

✓ **Spatial planning enhances the integration between diverse disciplines**

Discrete **professional disciplines** that involve spatial planning include use of land, fisheries and forests, urban, regional, transport and environmental planning. Economic and community planning are other important related areas.

✓ **It creates an enabling environment for sustainable development.**

Spatial planning is an iterative procedure carried out in order to create an **enabling environment for sustainable development** of land, fisheries and forests which meets people's needs and demands. It activates social processes of decision-making and consensus building.

✓ **It is a public sector activity at all levels (UNECE, 2008)**

Spatial planning takes place at **local, regional, national and international levels** and often results in the creation of a spatial plan in which the tensions among sectoral policies are reconciled.

## The role of spatial planning

Spatial planning can be examined under a number of aspects and its definition varies given the multiple and diverse administrative and planning systems that exist around the world. Whatever definition is used for spatial planning, there is at least one common element in all of them: reference is made to the **attempts of society to influence the spatial distribution** of people, their activities and resources. A common definition of spatial planning can be distilled out of this multitude of terms:

### DEFINITION

Spatial planning is defined and understood as any attempt by society, particularly the **public sector**, to influence or control the arrangement and **use of land, fisheries and forest**.

Given this definition, it becomes clear that "balancing different, often conflicting, public and private interests is a key element in spatial planning" (*Sager, 2012*).

Conflicting interests related to spatial planning could be caused, for example, by different policies regarding infrastructure, environment, urban and rural development.

For example, an infrastructure project might cause damage to the environment.

The key role of spatial planning is to **balance** the different demands in order to ensure a **rational arrangement of the activities** and the linkages between them, and to ensure that competing policy goals are reconciled. If such demands are not managed, the development might not be the most desirable for sustainability and improvement of living conditions, in general.

For example, an urban expansion project might cause damage to the adjacent prime agricultural area.



### *What are the aims of spatial planning?*

Among others, the aims of spatial planning are to:

1. manage rapid growth, urbanization and large-scale investments;
2. ensure sufficient infrastructure, water supply and sewage systems;
3. avoid corruption and ad hoc decision-making;
4. improve the linkages between urban and rural areas;
5. reduce environmental damage and limit impacts of natural disasters;
6. ensure sufficient availability of land, fisheries and forest to suit future requests;
7. enhance and protect natural resources; and
8. adapt to and prepare for climate changes.

**Example**

Thousands of demonstrators have marched today to protest against the planned construction of a large highway which is going to link the country capital to the coast. Hundreds of people were injured in clashes with the police and more than 20 people were arrested. Fierce opposition from locals and environmental campaigners is causing delays in the beginning of works. There are competing interests:

- Supporters believe the new infrastructure will cut journey times and bring opportunities of economic growth.
- Its opponents say it is unnecessary and will have a negative impact on the coastal environment.

A representative of the newly elected government has met a group of campaigners and has demonstrated a positive approach based on spatial planning strategies and its role. This is what the government has declared to the protesters:

*“The project was planned without taking into account the involved parties who opposed it, so it will be now re-discussed with all stakeholders.”*

The key role of spatial planning is to promote a more rational arrangement of activities and to reconcile competing policy goals.

## Key principles

Despite the variety of interpretations of spatial planning, a number of key principles are common to all spatial planning systems. GIZ (2012) ([www.giz.de/en/html/index.html](http://www.giz.de/en/html/index.html)) and UNECE (2008) identify a number of these principles which are applicable to spatial planning. The first three key principles to examine include:



As with the other key principles, these ones help to define the **scope of spatial planning** in a specific context. They also determine the **knowledge and skills planners should possess** to execute their tasks and responsibilities in an effective and efficient manner.

In the process of spatial planning, local conditions and knowledge should be considered and valorized. According to the following three principles, spatial planning is oriented to:

**Local conditions** Not only should the content of a plan be adapted to local conditions, but the methods also have to **fit the technical, economic and organizational capacities** of the local population as well as administration.

**Local knowledge** The knowledge within the society should be considered and valorized. Rural societies or groups often possess a **complex autochthonous knowledge** of their natural environment. Therefore, they can contribute valuable information and should be mobilized during the planning process.

**Local strategies** Traditional rural societies have **their own way** of approaching problems and **settling conflicts** concerning the use of land, fisheries and forestry. In the process of spatial planning, such mechanisms have to be understood and taken into account.

The framework of laws and policies of spatial planning has at its basis the two following principles, as well...

✓ **Subsidiarity**

Central government has backed the extension of industrial areas around the main cities to promote their economic development, but urban expansion has destroyed local agricultural resources around these centres. The protests of local communities have been ignored. This policy of development has to stop. We want our say.

In this example, all steps of urban development have been decided at a central level, which has proven irresponsible to the needs of citizens and to local

✓ **Proportionality**

The natural reserve does not allow local populations to use natural water resources. Not all people respect this prohibition, because it damages all local productions and does not consider that there are those who are respectful of the environment.

In this case, too strict rules and legislation risk the destruction of local initiative and creativity. They also can be unfeasible to implement and

requirements.

**Subsidiarity**



The subsidiarity principle implies **decentralizing the spatial planning to the level where it belongs**; in principle, to the lowest level possible. In other words, "decentralize if possible, centralize if necessary".

enforce.

**Proportionality**



The proportionality principle refers to **defining the proper balance between rules and regulations** and the responsibility that can be left to the citizens, local communities and the private sector.

*Example*

***In each of these situation, the following principles have been applied***

Pastoral farmers of the local tribe attended a meeting with government technicians working on a project of forest landscape restoration. The project works to combine the best of traditional practices with the best of modern, improved practices.

**Local knowledge**

The upgrades of the major transport infrastructure of the country were decided, planned and implemented at national level because of the scale of the project.

**Subsidiarity**

The decision-making process involved all stakeholders, including local populations and, for the first time, nomadic tribes which are concerned by the project's implementation of fencing of cropland.

**Inclusive process**

According to the principle of subsidiarity, the decision-making process should be driven by local requirements. However, it may be necessary for the decision to be made at higher levels because of the scale of the issue or the objective being pursued (as in the case of a major infrastructure). In addition, in the process of spatial planning, local knowledge should be considered and valorized and all stakeholder groups should be represented.

Spatial planning is also based on the two following key principles:

**Vertical level**

Spatial planning needs to combine **local needs and interests with provisions made by higher levels.**

This combination can only be achieved in a

**Horizontal level**

Spatial planning requires **sector coordination** and coordination across administrative borders with other affected authorities (neighbourhood

sustainable way if stakeholders from all levels participate in the process and talk and listen to each other.

districts, municipalities etc.). The diverse functions and uses of land, fisheries and forestry make it necessary to apply an **interdisciplinary approach**.

Spatial planning is also based on the two following key principles:

### Stakeholder improvement

The participatory methods used in all steps of spatial planning promote the technical and organizational capabilities of all participants, thereby **improving their capacity to plan and act**. In the medium term, this leads to an improvement in the capacity of local groups or administrative entities for self-determination.

### Transparency

If there is no transparency on decisions about future uses of land, fisheries and forestry, **risks are high that some people will be deprived of their rights** and/or that future use will be non-sustainable.

#### Example

The dam was built with the **involvement of local farmers** who participated from the planning stage to the final construction and implementation. They could have **access to information** about development proposals, plans and policies, and were able to comment on proposals. Their objections were discussed by local authorities and, where possible, taken into consideration and implemented. The systems so far developed is operated and maintained by the farmers themselves.

Spatial planning is oriented to:

### Future

Spatial planning is not only about mapping the current property uses or covers. It should also determine how the property **will be used in the future**.

### Iterative process

**Iteration** is both **the principle and the method** of spatial planning. New developments and findings are specifically observed and incorporated into the planning process. It may lead to the revision of decisions and the repetition of steps already taken.

#### Example

Two years after the creation of the National Park to protect the forest ecosystem, local authorities consulted the population to **verify the impact of the park on local farmers** and to sustain them to find new sources of revenue. Practical small-scale enterprises have been set up to improve livelihoods using natural resources in a sustainable way, because the purpose of the park is not only

to improve progressively the natural resources in the area, but to **sustain the economic development** and quality of life of rural households.

## Spatial planning functions

To understand what spatial planning is, we have identified a definition of spatial planning and have examined the key principles that define the scope of spatial planning.

Now, we can conclude the lesson by reviewing the **main functions that spatial planning serves** in order to manage the competing interests and demands on land, fisheries and forests. These functions include:

- ↳ The development function
- ↳ The regulatory or restrictive function
- ↳ The coordinative function

These functions should be undertaken at the various administrative levels (national, regional and/or local level) depending on what is the most suitable distribution of responsibilities for a certain context (*UNECE, 2008*).

Through spatial planning:

*...new spatial developments are created*

➔ This is the **development function**.

It includes the creation of infrastructure and of new urban areas; the exploitation of natural resources; the regeneration of former industrial areas; and the provision of basic services.

*...rules and regulations are developed, applied and enforced*

➔ This is the **regulatory function**.

Rules and regulations are necessary to control certain uses of land, fisheries and forests, to protect public and private ownership and to avoid negative or to facilitate positive externalities of certain land uses.

*...the plans of the various actors are coordinated by identifying priorities and providing a common direction*

➔ This is the **coordination function**.

The intentions and efforts of the actors are brought together to avoid conflict, reduce redundancy and, where possible, create synergy, for example, between plans on climate adaptation and plans on renovation of the drainage systems.

## Summary

Spatial planning refers to the methods used by the public sector to influence the distribution of people and activities in space and time of various scales. It serves as a means to avoid uncontrolled rapid growth, to ensure a facilitation of the required and basic supply network, to protect the environment and to manage the diverging interests regarding the use of land, fisheries and forestry. It is, therefore, important that these conflicting interests are balanced and coordinated through the spatial plans.

A number of key principles should be applied when undertaking spatial planning, including the involvement of all stakeholders. The local circumstances and traditions should be considered by using a holistic, transparent and inclusive planning approach.