

EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COHESION: VISIONS AND PROSPECTS

Abstract

Territorial cohesion represented a goal with a changing importance during time. Since the territorial impact of the most important sector policies proved the existence of contradictory effects, territorial cohesion gained in importance and became outlined as a goal and as field of action. The main visions regarding the models that lead to increased territorial cohesion will be compared with the identified trends and the priorities of European Territorial Agenda 2020 in order to outline how territorial differences have impact on European policy.

Keywords: territorial cohesion, diversity, competitiveness, territorial capital

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COEZIUNEA TERITORIALĂ EUROPEANĂ: VIZIUNI ȘI PERSPECTIVE

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Rezumat

Coeziunea teritorială a reprezentat un obiectiv a cărui importanță a fluctuat de-a lungul timpului. Pe măsură ce impactul teritorial al celor mai importante politici sectoriale a dovedit existența unor efecte contradictorii, coeziunea teritorială a câștigat în importanță și s-a clarificat atât ca obiectiv, cât și ca domeniu de acțiune. Principalele viziuni privind modelele care conduc către creșterea coeziunii teritoriale europene vor fi comparate cu tendințele identificate și prioritățile Agendei Teritoriale Europene 2020 în vederea conturării modului în care diferențele teritoriale au impact asupra politicii europene.

Cuvinte cheie: coeziune teritorială, diversitate, competitivitate, capital teritorial



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1. INTRODUCTION

Spatial planning have a very important role to play as support of policy making since many aspects of public concern manifest territorial characteristics that necessitate adaptation and careful design to keep goals achievable within an efficiency driven framework of actions. The European Union gathers twenty seven states and even more nations that have different histories of spatial planning although many similarities are also noticeable (Candea et al., 2006).

The design of European policies needs more cohesion in spatial planning in order to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. The goal of European territorial cohesion is currently pursued in various sectors, but it also represents a specialized field of action with important progress in its institutionalization.

The milestones of this progress will be analyzed by comparing them with expectations in order to frame the perspective of European territorial cohesion in the decades to come.

2. UNDERSTANDING TERRITORIAL COHESION VISIONS OF EU

The pursuit of territorial cohesion by European Union (EU) is supported by the efforts of the Directorate General Regio and Directorate General Employment of the European Commission, while the shadows of uncertainty are also getting stronger by the opposition of some Member States (MS), especially France and the Netherlands. The formal basis for this is article 16 of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Treaty of Nice.

Despite the effort and formal recognition, territorial cohesion is in fact a biased concept with many interpretations. For instance, in the polycentric perspective the focus is falling in inter-connected urban centers that drive smart growth and lead to territorial cohesion by diffusion effects. According to other opinions, the material reality of territorial cohesion is a minimum level of services that are available in all European regions. In fact, territorial cohesion could be regarded as the territorial dimension of Europe's social model.

The various opinions and interpretations given to the concept of territorial cohesion could be divided in four categories according to their core leading concept, such as (Lennert and Robert, 2010):

- Coherent European policy;
- Competitive Europe;

- Europe in balance;
- Green and clean Europe.

Coherent European Policy. The territorial impact of EU policies proved to be conflicting in many aspects streamlining the efforts toward policy coherence. In order to achieve this it is necessary to have horizontal coordination, a characteristic that was neglected in the early 1990s in most of EU's sector policies because in most member states was of little concern. Among the exceptions could be listed Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, France, and more recently Slovenia (Profiroiu, 2007). The malfunctioning of sector policies from a territorial perspective was documented by DG Regio that supported several researches in this direction, such as the EPSON project. Sector policies with major territorial impact are the Regional Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy, the Trans-European Network of Transport policy, the Environmental Policy by at least four directives – Habitat Directive, Birds Directive, Air Quality Directive, and Water Framework Directive. Currently the policy coherence of spatial planning is considered subordinated to the concept of spatial development and is supported by encouraging the use of spatial frameworks in policy making.

Competitive Europe is a vision developed gradually along with the strengthening of globalization's challenges for the European economy as a whole, but also of its member states. It has strong supporters especially in the northern Europe most of the vision being grounded on the Dutch concept. The redistribution of wealth is considered less important, the main recommendation for policy makers being to find the best way of valuing the uniqueness of their territorial capital.

Territorial capital is the latest vision on what should be the source of the competitive advantage and it replaces former concepts like urban network and gateway cities. Both of them focus on cities as poles of development that are securing the access of Europe in the global economy (Popescu and Corbos, 2010). Their physical representation is the so-called pentagon of Europe formed by London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg (fig. 1).



FIGURE 1. PENTAGON (CITIES) OF EUROPE

The pentagon outlines the most developed region of Europe that is able to make the breakthrough within global competition acting as a streamliner for the whole European economy.

By shifting to territorial capital the emphasis fall more on regions than on urban areas. The capital is given by geographic position, geographic size, climate, natural resources, quality of life, and economies of scale. Other factors are traditional culture and quality of governance expressed as mutual trust and informal rules and an intangible element made up by the combination of these components and that give uniqueness to each region.

Europe in balance is a vision that is grounded on the need to transform Europe in cohesive territory, where economic and social disparities are removed, the differences among regions being in their advantage against the global competition. The means to achieve this balance is by public policy levies that correct the causes of disparities up to a level where services of general interest have similar availability in all areas. The main supporters of this vision are mainly southern countries like Spain and Portugal.

Services of general interest are considered important not only for territorial cohesion, but also for the competitiveness of EU. Since the provision of these services cannot be guaranteed by the market, EU policies should reach out. These services are: electronic communication, electricity, gas, postal services, water, transport, and broadcasting (Constantin et al., 2013). Throughout Europe the availability of such services is an issue only for remote regions, with low population density that are often peripheral.

The underlying premises of this vision are:

- Europeans are prone to their space due to differences in languages, cultural traditions and identities;
- Diversity should be preserved as much as possible since it is more an advantage than a disadvantage;
- All peoples of Europe should be treated equally, with no discrimination arriving on the ground of their place of birth.

The vision of balanced Europe is transposed in actions by the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Funds that support projects aiming to bring many regions within the coverage of services of general interest.

Green and clean Europe is an accompanying vision that was outlined along with the contribution of Denmark to the European policy making. The priority given in this country, but also other northern countries like Sweden and Finland, to environmental concerns in spatial planning, was sustained in European environmental and spatial policy. The premise of this vision is that sustainable development cannot be achieved without a balanced spatial development. The integration of environmental goals in spatial planning was formalized by approving the principles of ecosystem approach becoming operational by the design and establishment of the Natura 2000 European ecological network (Ioan et al., 2010).

The territorial challenges faced by Europe are global economic competition, ageing, migration, population decline, climate change, and energy security. In order to address these issues in an effective manner there is needed a coordinated policy response backed by real territorial governance.

3. INDICATORS OF TERRITORIAL COHESION

The goal of territorial cohesion was considered important enough to be supported by a proper monitoring system based on carefully selected indicators within a coordinated and transnational research action. The ESPON project focused on this issue and after the investigation of more than 600 indicators there were selected 32 indicators grouped in the following six territorial cohesion objectives:

- Strong local economies ensuring global competitiveness;
- Innovative territories;
- Fair access to services, market and jobs;
- Inclusion and quality of life;
- Attractive regions of high ecological values and strong territorial capital;

- Integrated polycentric territorial development.

The entire list of indicators is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1. EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL COHESION INDICATORS

Territorial objective	Indicators	Spatial resolution
Strong local economies ensuring global competitiveness	Labor productivity	NUTS 2
	GDP per capita in PPP	NUTS 3
	Overall unemployment rate	NUTS 3
	Old age dependence ratio	NUTS 3
Innovative territories	Population aged 25-64 with tertiary education	NUTS 2
	Intramural expenditures on research and development	NUTS 2
	Employment rate 20-64	NUTS 2
Fair access to services, market and jobs	Access to compulsory school	NUTS 0
	Access to hospitals	NUTS 0
	Accessibility of grocery services	SILC data
	Access to university	SILC data
	Accessibility potential by road	NUTS 3
	Accessibility potential by rail	NUTS 3
	Accessibility potential by air	NUTS 3
Inclusion and quality of life	Disposable household income	NUTS 2
	Life expectancy at birth	NUTS 2
	Proportion of early school leavers	NUTS 1
	Gender imbalances	NUTS 3
	Different female-male unemployment rate	NUTS 2
	Ageing index	NUTS 3
Attractive regions of high ecological values and strong territorial capital	Potential vulnerability to climate change	NUTS 3
	Air pollution: PM 10	NUTS 3
	Air pollution: ozone concentrations	NUTS 3
	Soil sealing per capita	NUTS 3
	Mortality, hazards, and risks	n.a.
	Biodiversity	n.a.
	Renewable energy potential	n.a.
Integrated polycentric territorial development	Population potential within 50 km	NUTS 3
	Net migration rate	NUTS 3
	Cooperation intensity	NUTS 2
	Cooperation degree	NUTS 2
	Polycentricity index	n.a.

Source: ESPON, 2013

According to the assessment made by using these indicators, the strongest positive trends are recorded for labor productivity and early school leavers, while negative trends, that are not so strong, are unfolding for old age dependency ratio, employment rate 20-64, and accessibility potential by rail. It should be stressed that for many indicators the final resolution was *not available*, fact that calls for improved data collection and renewal of assessment. These indicators include access to compulsory school, access to hospitals, ageing index and all environmental indicators.

4. PRIORITIES OF EUROPEAN TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2020

The territorial development of Europe is influenced by a number of global and local trends that there identified and broadly explained in a report prepared specially for supporting the territorial cohesion policy (EC, 2011a). The most important processes considered to have impact on EU's territorial development are:

- Increased impact of globalization on territories of Europe: since Europe is one of the major economic poles in the world with advanced integration of relations with NAFTA, India and Eastern Asia. Meanwhile, its economic relation with Africa and Middle East are hampered in Africa and the Middle East due to large economic disparities and political instabilities. The position of EU in the emerging economic order should be strengthened;
- Long-term effects of the global economic and financial crisis: the impact and path of recovery from crisis is very different across European regions depending on their economic structure. Economies that were highly integrated in the globalized flows proved to be the most sensitive ones;
- EU integration that increase the interdependences among regions – this complex process is continuing although borders and other administrative barriers interferes especially in cross-border regions;
- Negative demographic and social processes that increase imbalance between rural and urban areas and between eastern and western Europe;
- Slow changes in connectivity provided by accessibility and transportation;
- Climate change with a wide range of impacts depending on the territorial diversity;
- Energy availability that impact on regional competitiveness;
- Increasing efforts to preserve Europe's natural heritage by a wise environmental management.

Considering these trends and processes and the results of wide and thorough reports (ESPON, 2013; UE, 2010) there were outlined the European priorities of the territorial agenda for 2020 as follows (EC, 2011b):

- Fostering of polycentric and balanced territorial development;
- Encouragement of integrated development in cities, rural regions and others;

- Territorial integration in functional cross-border and transnational regions;
- Improvement of territorial connections for individuals, communities and enterprises;
- Management and linkage of ecological, landscape, and cultural values of regions.

The territorial keys that connect these priorities with the Europe 2020 goals are accessibility, services of general interest, valuation of territorial potential, urban networking and functional areas.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Europe is striving to achieve economic and social cohesion by various sector policies. The lack of horizontal integration in its first stages together with the large territorial diversity of European regions led to conflicting outcomes at various territorial units. In addition, the vision about how Europe should continue to develop was also different. The territorial cohesion was for quite a long while a backstage issue but the latest studies and reports provided strong enough proves to consider it an important European concern. Hence, the possibilities of monitoring and assessment improved along with the INTERCO project, while the priorities of the territorial agenda 2020 were outlined and linked to the Europe 2020 strategy. Territorial cohesion is considered now an important issue and it is based on the concept of territorial capital pursuing the valuation of the uniqueness of each region not only on European scale, but also in global interactions.

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