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# EU territory and policy-making: From words to deeds to promote policy integration

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## Abstract

This paper addresses recent developments in the area of EU territorial cohesion. A first section is dedicated to the emergence of the place-based approach as a new paradigm of the EU cohesion policy, and the subsequent need for vertical, horizontal and territorial integration of policies. In a second step, progress recently made in the framework of the EU Territorial Agenda revision process towards a better understanding of, and recognition of the need for, territorial cohesion and policy integration is commented upon. Finally, a case is made for tangible steps to be taken to reform formal EU policy making, to strengthen the territorial dimension of both the overall policy approach and relevant sectoral policies.

**Keywords:** EU, Territorial Agenda, Territorial Cohesion, Europe 2020

## **Introduction**

Economic processes take place in distinct territories such as cities and regions, they impact on neighbouring areas, generate flows of goods, people and ideas, lead to concentration, economies of scale and scope (or de-concentration, diseconomies of scale), etc. Therefore economic policy cannot afford territory-blindness. The overall economic performance of Europe is the aggregate of a myriad of actions taken by firms scattered across the continent, most of which depend on territorial assets such as transport connections or the quality of local labour force. Action taken by public bodies significantly impacts development and growth. For instance, decisions about the functioning of urban agglomerations directly influence the competitiveness of enterprises.

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) and the two successive versions of the EU Territorial Agenda (TA 2007 and its update TA 2020) raised considerable awareness about this issue over the past two decades, but essentially among administrations responsible for, and other bodies involved in, territorial development and EU cohesion policy. By and large, the process has remained informal in nature. True, “territorial cohesion” has been formally recognised as a fundamental component of the EU cohesion policy, but a commonly agreed definition of this notion remains desperately out of reach.

Considerable progress still needs to be made to generate widespread recognition of the critical importance of the territorial dimension of EU policy making, especially among those unfamiliar with planning and cohesion policy. In recent time however, significant steps forward were achieved in the right direction, especially over the period 2009-2011 during the successive Swedish, Spanish, Belgian, Hungarian and Polish Presidencies of the EU. Moreover, the Territorial Agenda updating process took on board the new line of thought initiated by the OECD (2009) and the Barca report (2009), namely the place-based approach, the guiding concept of the 2014-2020 programming period of the EU structural funds.

While shedding further light on the place-based approach paradigm, the first section of this paper aims to clarify the closely associated notions of horizontal, vertical and territorial integration. In a second step, a brief presentation of progress made during the five EU Presidencies referred to above will be provided. Finally, missing policy action will be addressed, in terms of both the overall EU policy approach and the territorial dimension of specific EU policies. This paper largely draws on the Background Report “How to strengthen the territorial dimension of Europe 2020 in the EU Cohesion Policy” elaborated in 2011 at the request of the Polish Presidency (Böhme et al., 2011).

## Place-based approach and policy integration

The idea of strengthening the territorial dimension in public policy-making presents close connections with the place-based approach advocated by Barca (2009). It puts a strong emphasis on the involvement of local and regional elites (vertical integration) and the necessary dialogue with various sector policies (horizontal integration). The open dialogue between the various stakeholders is clearly in the focus, in the form of both formal participation processes and informal dialogues at the working level, as informal groups and forums have become an imperative in the age of the network society.

The figure below illustrates the relative importance of, and interrelations between, the dimensions of the place-based approach needed for strengthening the territorial dimension of policies (left side). This is put in relation to instruments to strengthen this territorial dimension (right side) analysed in an on-going research project carried out by Spatial Foresight . The most promising of these instruments are strategy and programme development (in the framework of territorial and other policies alike), followed by the legal framework and various moderation / mediation and dialogue processes (Fig.1).

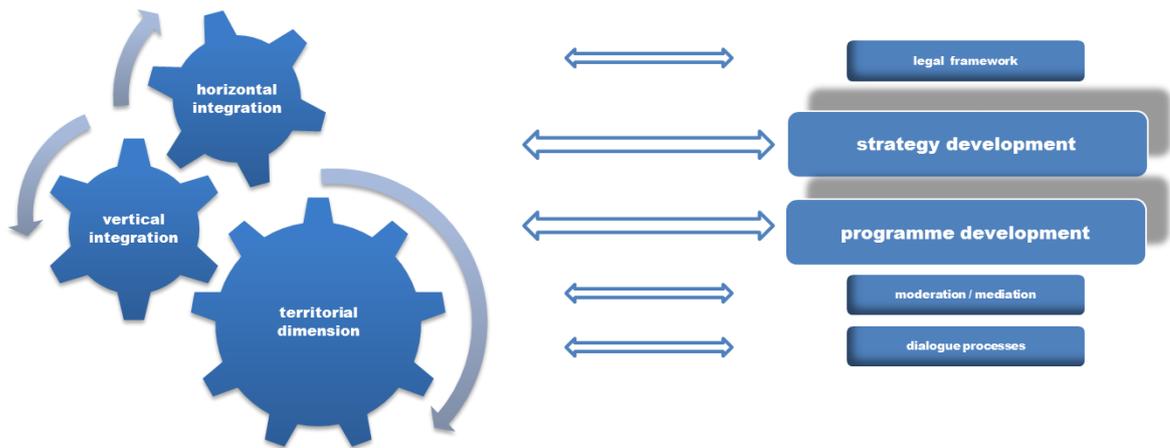


Figure 1. Putting territorial cohesion into motion (Source: Spatial Foresight 2011)

Today, we witness at least three different approaches to the integration of territorial considerations in the areas of policy-making and development of various related instruments:

- **Spatially blind.** Spatially blind policy-making does not distinguish between territories and puts the focus on a homogenous implementation everywhere. In practice, this approach was implicitly adopted in the Sapir Report (2003) and other more recent publications such as the World Development Report of the World Bank (2009). The basic assumption is that policies largely follow economic developments and should fortify positive developments. The Europe 2020 Strategy might be seen as an example of such a policy.

- **Spatially targeted.** Spatially targeted policy-making reflects territorial diversity and usually it considers existing territorial patterns not necessarily as optimal. Considering the territorial diversity, challenges, potentials and interdependencies, spatially targeted policy-making attempts to adjust public interventions and investments to different territorial characteristics.
- **Place-based.** The place-based approach as developed by Barca goes one step further. Firstly, it does not equal place with administrative units. Secondly, it puts a strong focus on the involvement of local elites, i.e. important decision makers and opinion-makers. In doing so, it advocates a strong multi-level governance approach, where the local elites are decisive stakeholders ensuring that local tacit knowledge is taken on board and local processes are mobilized. The approaches advocated in the TA 2020 might be considered as place-based.

A progressive but resolute shift towards the place-based approach seems highly desirable to make various policies and instruments more effective and efficient.

### *Tailoring the place-based approach to different planning systems*

There is no uniform methodology to implement a place-based approach. The Polish Presidency of the EU has proposed territorial keys (cf. Böhme et al., 2011) as the guiding questions that persons programming each horizontal or sectoral policy should answer during the programming phase. This is similar to the German and Austrian territorial impact assessment (TIA) approach. The difference is that the territorial keys in some circumstances can be used as guidelines for sectoral and horizontal policies as well. However, their main purpose remains to raise awareness and get the message across: “territory matters for development”.

An interesting option has been proposed by McCann (2011) i.e. integrated regional typology covering smart, inclusive and sustainable growth in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy. The main advantage of this approach is a clear demonstration of differences in the mix of challenges and opportunities that different regions face. The priorities of developmental policies should be differentiated accordingly.

Quite different is the Nordic way of implementation of the place based paradigm. In many Nordic countries a territorially sensitive development is achieved in the course of vertical and horizontal informal and formal debates. In those countries institutions and in particular a culture of dialogue are sometimes more important than formal territorial typologies or legal tools used within the programming process.

Despite the aforementioned heterogeneity and diversity of development programming and implementation mechanisms inspired by the place-based approach, these share a common denominator of key-requirements (Fig.2):

1. Institutions able to harmonize/coordinate, guide in harmony development of different “places” together.
2. Institutions capable to guide, influence and foster development of a “given place”.
3. Knowledge on the overall developmental context i.e. developmental goals and priorities for all “places” and the best means for pursuing them and monitoring of the progress to that end.
4. Recognition of territorial diversity in pursuing overall developmental goals i.e. different ways of addressing developmental goals and priorities for different part of the territory under influence of institutions mentioned under point 1.
5. Knowledge on developmental specificity of a given place (territorial capital, other types of local/regional potential etc.)
6. Knowledge on the impact of supra-local policies on local development and of local policies on supra-local development.
7. Institutional frame for multilevel governance dialogue.
8. Dialogue between different developmental agents/institutions described under point 1 and 2. Essential part of this dialogue is captured by the notions of vertical and horizontal integration.

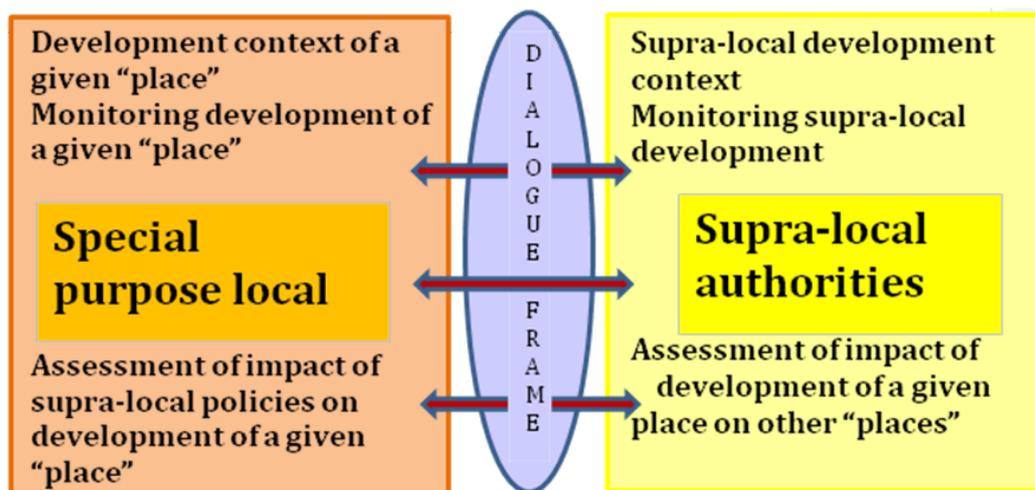


Figure 2. Key elements of the place based approach (Source: Szlachta & Zaucha, 2012)

To strengthen the case for an integrated and placed based approach, the following sections expand on three of its main features, namely horizontal integration, vertical integration and (c) territorial integration.

### ***Horizontal integration***

The horizontal integration of sectoral policies at the EU level has been strongly advocated in the TA 2020 and its forerunner-documents<sup>i</sup>, and, to some extent, in the last four Cohesion Reports.

Policy integration is a key-feature of the place-based approach, regarded by the OECD as the “new paradigm of regional policy”. Barca considers it to be the cornerstone of the reformed EU Cohesion Policy as recommended in his report.

Existing research has underlined insufficient understanding in cohesion policy strategy development and debate of what is driving or hindering regional economic change, and the lack of a development model behind the adopted strategies. This weakness has made cohesion policy open to several inappropriate interpretations (for example, of being a tool for financial redistribution among regions, or for regional convergence /.../); it has led to growing criticisms – that it acts against labour mobility or against efficient agglomeration processes; and it has diluted its territorial or place-based nature. The reference to places, to a place-based approach, has been progressively left to a “niche” of the policy arena. The place-based dimension has been somehow constrained into a corner – the “spatial” corner – and has been progressively treated as a perspective which is separate from the “economic” and “social” perspectives, rather than as a way of approaching both these dimensions; the perspective has been used for some limited programmes (territorial cooperation, Leader – in rural areas – and Urban, while they existed, and a few others), but does not characterise all interventions. (Barca, 2009, p. 93)

He further emphasises the need for a consistent territorial approach as a component of any cohesion policy intervention, which cannot be separated from the social and economic components.

Interestingly, policy integration is clearly also on the agenda in the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy (EC, 2010), be it for the country reporting system (which needs to ‘ensure an integrated approach to policy design and implementation’) or for the ‘integrated guidelines’. However, this integration would encompass a limited number of policies only, namely the budgetary, economic and employment policies. Nothing is said, for example, about environmental, transport and energy policies, despite their relevance for various ‘‘Europe 2020’ priority themes and flagship initiatives.

To date however, pleas for policy integration have remained more rhetorical than effective. Countless articles and resolutions have highlighted its critical importance, but very little has actually been done to set up the appropriate decision-making mechanisms needed for its consistent implementation in the real world. In its conclusions, an interesting study commissioned by DG Regio and published in 2001 already pointed to the fact that “Community culture, in terms of politico-administrative practices, is excessively sectoral. (...) Curiously, the progress of European integration and the deepening of common policies which resulted from it were expressed in hyper-

specialisation of functions and competences within the Community authorities, and in particular within the Commission.” (Agence Européenne et al., 2001, p. 155-156).

This may have to do with the emergence of a number of new trends in the public policy arena. Public authorities often fail to define and effectively apply the rules needed to safeguard the common good. Instead, their policy approach is mainly demand-driven, muddling along a path of competing, selfish interests. According to John Ralston Saul, “we do live in a corporatist society, where the public good is minimised and governments through their managers are expected to concentrate on ‘interest mediation’, as the neo-corporatists put it.” (1998, p. 139)

This should not justify passivity. On the contrary, action is needed, especially at the EU level, but a considerably more daring approach is required which moves beyond the rather tentative steps taken thus far. If the aim is to make the ESDP and TA 2020 cross-sector integrated approach a reality it is essential to make formal decisions, including the adoption and implementation of a formal comprehensive strategy, whose explicit ambition is to go much farther than wishful thinking as far as the integration of territorially-relevant policies is concerned.

The Territorial Agenda 2020 places much emphasis on policy coordination and integration. While stressing that “Cohesion Policy and also Rural Development Policy with their integrating character and certain cross-sector nature are key instruments for encouraging the balanced territorial development of the European Union”, the document advocates “a more strategic approach to enhance territorial cohesion” and supports:

... deepening the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy where appropriate: strengthening mechanisms which can ensure the territorial coordination of its interventions; improving the territorial dimension of all steps of strategic programming, evaluation and monitoring activities; ensuring scope for integrated place-based programmes and projects, and integrating different funds in regional strategies. (TA 2020, §§ 44 - 46).

Both the coordination and integration of policies thus seem essential, but coordination without integration would not make sense, as it would amount to an inefficient ex-post mutual adjustment of policies initially designed in isolation. Without the prior integration of various policy measures into a consistent territorial strategy, policy coordination will remain effectively irrelevant. Furthermore, it is important that the cross-sector dialogue puts the relevant partners on an equal footing. This is, however, often difficult to achieve if one of them airs coordination ambitions.

A great deal of sectoral policies carried out at the EU, national or sub-national levels impact on territorial development. Among these, various policies are generally recognised as “territorially-relevant”, including economic and regional development, transport, energy generation and supply, environmental policy (including water and

other natural resource conservation, air quality, coastal zone management, tackling climate change etc.), agriculture and rural development policy. The territorial impact of some other, “non territorially-focused”, policies is less widely acknowledged but certainly not negligible. For example, EU competition, single market and single currency policies influence the strategic choices made by investors with regard to the location of their various activity units, with considerable effects on regional development and job opportunities.

Some attempts have been made to better capture the territorial impact of EU policies, even though the exercise has always proved challenging. Ten years ago for example, the study referred to above strove to gauge “the spatial impacts of Community policies and costs of non-co-ordination” (Agence Européenne et al., 2001). After analysing the territorial impacts of the common agricultural, transport and environmental policies (CAP, CTP and CEP respectively), the research team formulated various recommendations to improve EU policy coordination.

Subsequently, no less than eleven “policy impact” research projects were carried out in the framework of a dedicated priority of the ESPON 2006 programme. These projects addressed a wide array of EU policies, including trans-European networks and related policies, energy, CAP, R&D policy, structural funds/cohesion, accession aids, fisheries policy, environmental policy, EU economic policies and the location of economic activities. In addition, a number of projects in the ESPON 2013 Programme also address the territorial impact of EU policies or directives.

### ***Vertical Integration***

Not only horizontal, but also the vertical integration of policies with a territorial dimension is needed. Therefore a sound multilevel governance system remains pivotal to the whole exercise. This issue was of critical importance in the debate concerning the reform of the EU institutions. The European Commission White Paper on European Governance of 2001 significantly influenced the institutional reforms introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, with particular regard to the implications of the subsidiarity principle. For the application of this principle, local and regional authorities were formally recognised, for the first time, as an integral part of the Community structure.

In his report referred to above, Barca provided important insights into the closely interrelated notions of subsidiarity and multilevel governance. After recalling that subsidiarity is “the general principle according to which authorities should perform only those activities which cannot be performed effectively at a more local level”, he insists that:

... in the context of place-based policies, subsidiarity needs to be interpreted with reference to responsibility not for whole **sectors**, but for whole **tasks**. The subsidiarity criterion, therefore, needs to govern the allocation of tasks.[...] The architecture of policy-making which implements this more

modern arrangement has come to be called **multi-level governance**, a system by which the responsibility for policy design and implementation is distributed between different **levels of government** and **special-purpose local institutions** (private associations, joint local authority bodies, cooperation across national borders, public-private partnerships and so on). In this architecture, it is up to the top levels of government to set general goals and performance standards and to establish and enforce the “rules of the game”. It is up to the lower levels to have “the freedom to advance the ends as they see fit”. Special-purpose local institutions, comprising both public and private actors with responsibility for delivering specific services, or bundles of services, play a decisive role in eliciting the knowledge and preferences of citizens of specific places. Since they are formed through the policy process, they often define what a “place” is. In their absence, multi-level governance can degenerate into a system of negotiation between bureaucracies representing different elites, with an authority defined by purely jurisdictional boundaries. (Barca, 2009, p. 41 emphasis in original)

As suggested by its very name, the place-based approach clearly entrusts local actors with significant responsibilities. However, it should in no way be mistaken for some sort of ‘localist’ or communitarian paradigm (Barca, 2012, p. 219). On the contrary, the exogenous intervention of supra-local authorities has a very important role to play in “enforcing the rules of the game”, which entails in particular the transfer of financial means “subject to conditionalities on both objectives and institutions” (Barca, 2009, p. 5).

### ***Institutional adjustments for vertical and horizontal integration***

As pointed out by Barca (2012, p. 219) the local elites might engage themselves in rent seeking instead of becoming part of a genuine developmental dialogue. Therefore the place based paradigm requires adjustments not only at the national or EU but also at the local and regional levels. Since its key ingredient is a genuine dialogue about the development of a given “place”, appropriate instruments and knowledge from all participants are essential. To secure successful vertical and horizontal integration, the following principles in particular need to be adhered to:

- subsidiary and genuine multilevel governance;
- closer monitoring of territorial development, at different geographical scales, by different actors, but also with mutually compatible instruments/methodologies,
- systematic assessment of the impact of national and EU policies on a given place as well as assessment of impacts of local and regional activities on national and European development (currently made in exceptional cases).

Compliance with these principles should allow to base integration of policies on facts rather than perceptions and subjective feelings.

### ***Territorial Integration***

Various types of territories represent a functional area encompassing a relatively large collection of mutually dependent sub-areas. In most cases, a functional area does not align with an administrative entity. In consequence, a consistent territorial development policy cannot be carried out by one and the same body directly elected by the population of such a functional area. Even though the creation of such a body may be commendable in many cases, it involves in practice a very difficult reform process, which is so protracted or even unrealistic that preference is generally given to more pragmatic, albeit less democratic policy responses.

Be that as it may, the need for territorial integration in such areas is generally recognised. By “territorial integration” here is meant the process of reshaping functional areas to make them evolve into a consistent geographical entity; this entails overcoming the various negative effects stemming from the presence of one or more administrative borders, which hamper harmonious territorial development.

Territorial integration may take place at various geographic scales. A classic and relatively widespread example of territorial integration consists in the implementation of a joint territorial development policy by a grouping of local authorities and other relevant bodies belonging to a large urban or metropolitan area, including those responsible for suburban areas, or even relatively distant rural areas.

However, territorial integration is also required at very different territorial levels . As a result of the European integration and globalisation processes, new forms of functional areas tend to emerge, bringing together various regions characterised by a growing level of mutual dependency: within such areas, steps taken in one country can significantly impact territorial development in another, neighbouring or even more distant, country. Initially, this was particularly observable in border areas, where the need for cross-border cooperation conducive to territorial integration led to the first generation of INTERREG programmes more than two decades ago. Subsequently, awareness rose about the territorial interdependence of regions belonging to much wider areas. This justified the promotion of transnational cooperation in programmes of a dedicated strand of INTERREG (IIC, IIIB, IVB), and more recently the elaboration of strategies for the territorial development of the Baltic Sea and Danube macro-regions. Noteworthy here is the fact that in wide transnational areas, or even at the continental level, the interdependency relationships, hence the need to cooperate, do not necessarily concern geographically contiguous entities. This means that the “functional area” may actually consist, for example, in a network of discrete cities belonging to the same macro-region or global integration zone, whose other components may not be involved in the cooperation process.

In principle, the INTERREG territorial cooperation of the cross-border and transnational strands<sup>ii</sup> should focus on issues of real cross-border or transnational

relevance, i.e. issues which, by their very nature, cannot be effectively tackled without cooperation.

Examples of cross-border issues:

- lack of integration of public transport in a cross-border metropolitan area;
- obstacles to the cross-border mobility of a workforce and the lack of labour market integration in border areas;
- administrative, linguistic and other types of problems limiting cross-border access to health care / hospitals in a border area.

Examples of transnational issues:

- insufficient development of transnational freight (e.g. difficulty encountered in developing new service lines for different modes such as short-sea-shipping, freight-ways);
- lack of integration of SMEs in international R&D networks;
- drought, floods, river/ground water pollution in downstream regions of a transnational river basin triggered by inappropriate action/policy in upstream regions.

In practice however, many INTERREG operations fail to tackle such issues. This is particularly visible in the intervention logic of most INTERREG programmes. For example, the SWOT analyses of many INTERREG programmes do not differ significantly from those of the Convergence or Competitiveness & Employment Programmes: facts and trends analysed include population size and growth, GDP/head, water quality or biodiversity in specific areas etc., instead of addressing information shedding light on issues of cross-border or transnational relevance (population migration, workforce mobility, transport flows, cross-border or transnational trade, water pollution transfer, protected species migration, etc.) As a consequence, the set of priorities and specific objectives of the programme strategy primarily or exclusively address common issues of local, regional or national relevance.

## **Getting to grips with EU territorial cohesion: the legacy of five recent Presidencies of the Council**

Multiannual programming of the EU cohesion policy is a well-established tradition, as is the intergovernmental cooperation on EU territorial development between national administrations responsible for spatial planning in the member states. Until recently, this has not led, surprisingly enough, to any serious attempt to better link these two processes in order to explore their synergies and thus avoid the costs of non-coordination. The first significant step in this direction was taken rather recently, in the

context of the Barca report publication. Following this, the Director Generals responsible for territorial development policy in the European Union at their meeting in Seville in 2010, underlined the importance of inter-linkages between the Territorial Agenda and the 'Europe 2020' strategy.

This declaration expresses a clear will to promote a genuinely new opening in the dialogue between territorial and developmental policies. However, vigorous efforts are required to make this dialogue lead to tangible results. In this respect, the Swedish Presidency report (Böhme 2009) on the Territorial Agenda process, presented before the Seville note, provided some useful hints.

Firstly, it pointed to the need to extend the debate on territorial cohesion beyond the close circle of people who are directly involved. For this a clear, user-friendly and understandable "territorial language" should be developed.

Secondly, actions realised in connection with the implementation of the Territorial Agenda should be more comprehensive, attempting to capture the new working methods while promoting a cross-border view of territorial development, instead of remaining narrow, limited to spatial questions and unable to effectively spark the minds of decision makers.

Thirdly, territorial messages and actions should each be more focused, development-oriented and if possible measurable, reflecting concrete results which it is possible to effectively communicate to the general public.

Taking over on 1st July 2010 from the Spanish Presidency, the Belgian Presidency had three main tasks on its agenda: 1] make the Territorial Agenda better known among outsiders (i.e. taking on board the Swedish Presidency recommendation); 2] contribute to the clarification of the territorial cohesion governance (i.e. answer the question "who shall do what?"); 3] assist the coming Hungarian Presidency in revising the Territorial Agenda.

Task 3 consisted in preparing and chairing countless working sessions and more formal meetings organised to discuss the content of the future TA 2020. To contribute to Task 1, the first "Territorial Agenda Annual Conference (TAAC)" was convened in Namur on 28/29 September 2010, with the aim of making other decision makers dialogue with the NTCCP network<sup>iii</sup> and contribute to the Territorial Agenda revision process. As a first attempt in this direction, the TAAC discussed with other administrations responsible for transport and mobility policies the territorial impact of these policies and their possible contribution to EU territorial cohesion and the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy (see <http://www.ntccp-udg.eu/ntccp>). As to Task 2, it essentially consisted in organising a seminar bringing together the EU institutions and a task force entrusted with the clarification of decision-making mechanisms in the area of EU territorial cohesion.

Following the Swedish example and building on the conclusions of both its Belgian and Spanish predecessors, the Hungarian Presidency produced a new assessment. For this purpose, a survey was conducted in 2010 to consult the national authorities responsible for territorial issues in the Member States. The resulting “Evaluation Report of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union” (2011) underlined problems similar to those revealed by the Swedish Presidency. Many countries reported a kind of tension or insufficient coordination between spatial and economic policies and need to spatially integrate the latter ones. The essence of the problem was captured by the following opinion of one of the interviewees: “Performance in the spatial planning community is strong, in the sectoral policies weak.” These consultations and many other sessions of various working groups contributed to the main achievement of the Hungarian Presidency: the adoption of the TA 2020 on 19th May 2012 in Gödöllő.

The Polish Presidency was very ambitious and active. With regard to the Territorial Agenda 2020, they commissioned a background report. Building on it, they drafted an issue paper and developed a roadmap.

- **Background Report.** While proposing various steps to improve the effectiveness of the Europe 2020 strategy implementation, the report (Böhme et al., 2011) clarified how other policies – such as the future EU Cohesion Policy – could be influenced to strengthen their territorial dimension.
- **Issue paper.** This paper addresses the territorial dimension of EU Policies, strategic programming, coordination of policies, institutions, and a “territorially-sensitive diagnosis for a more tailored policy response” (Polish Presidency of the EU, 2011a). in the area of EU policy strategic programming. The paper develops six policy options addressing the programming of EU policies that could benefit from a territorial approach, the coordination of sector policies and the necessary institutional settings and knowledge to make things happen.
- **Roadmap.** Concerning the implementation of the TA 2020 the roadmap sets out a series of concrete actions addressed to the EU and Member States with the objective of integrating the territorial approach into EU policies in the course of delivering the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy (Polish Presidency of the EU, 2011b).

### ***Strengthening the territorial dimension in the EU policy approach***

The formal recognition of territorial cohesion as a shared responsibility of the EU has important consequences for the content and nature of the decisions to be made and for the decision-making process that should apply. In the new programming period the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) will integrate different EU funds, which is a right move into a right direction. However, the other proposed measure, such as focus on urban issues or local grass-root programming are not sufficient to turn the place-based paradigm into reality. They are too fragmented and lack systematic approach. In the new circumstances that have emerged the intergovernmental process previously used to guide EU territorial development is no longer sufficient.

### ***Territorial cohesion as a process: an EU reference document is needed***

Although territorial cohesion has become a fundamental objective of the EU its content and definition is far from being precise and clear (cf. Dühr et al., 2010; Faludi, 2005; Medeiros, 2011; Szlachta & Zaucha, 2010). Despite several conceptualisation attempts, the notion of territorial cohesion remains blurred, referring to territorial diversity and harmonious development of all places, which is perhaps the reason for its charm and common acceptance. In this paper we will treat territorial cohesion rather as a process of making policies more territorially oriented and better integrated than as the state of a territory as such.

The TA 2020 and several other documents<sup>iv</sup> have recently contributed to producing a better understanding of the strategic territorial issues of relevance for the EU. Most provide a geographically differentiated picture of the key challenges faced by the EU, including those which the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy is meant to take up. More is however needed to clarify policy action to be taken at the EU; national, regional and local levels to promote a territorial development model favouring smart, sustainable and inclusive growth while strengthening synergies between sector policies.

In February 2011, a seminar (already referred to above) took place in Brussels bringing together the EU institutions and a task force entrusted with the clarification of decision-making mechanisms in the area of EU territorial cohesion (see <http://www.ntccp-udg.eu/ntccp>). Two key questions were raised on that occasion: the strengthening of the territorial dimension of EU Cohesion Policy, and the coordination of EU policies with a territorial impact. In particular, participants were asked to express their views about the nature of the policy steps to be taken to address these questions: would a relatively pragmatic case-by-case approach suffice (e.g. Territorial Impact Assessment procedures – TIA) or should a more comprehensive policy approach be applied and if so with what type of instruments (e.g. the formal adoption of an integrated EU territorial development strategy).

Although the elaboration of a comprehensive integrated EU strategy should not be ruled out in principle, doubts may be expressed as to whether political consensus can be reached on such an ambitious undertaking. Nevertheless, participants in the seminar stressed that this should not justify limiting the ambition to a strictly case-by-case policy approach. An acceptable middle ground could consist in combining TIAs with a “roadmap”. Capitalising on some ESPON studies (in particular projects on scenarios), this roadmap would be regularly updated and serve as a reference framework for the TA 2020 application and the related performance monitoring. It could also be utilised as a reference tool to review progress made in achieving the ‘Europe 2020’ objectives of territorial relevance<sup>v</sup>. A White Paper on EU territorial cohesion could serve a similar purpose (which the European Parliament and the Committee of the Regions urged the Commission to produce).

Whatever its name (roadmap, strategy, vision or White Paper on EU territorial cohesion, etc.) and the exact nature of its content, an EU reference policy document should be elaborated to steer a process aimed at exploiting synergies between EU sector policies in different types of territories while contributing to the successful implementation of the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy. A document such as the TA 2020, which remains essentially intergovernmental and informal in nature, cannot provide sufficiently detailed, EU-specific and influential policy guidance for such an ambitious undertaking. The TA 2020 must continue to serve as a valuable informal interface between territorial development policies carried out at the national and regional levels and EU policies with a territorial dimension, but as far as the latter are concerned, a specific formal EU guidance reference is required.

### ***Deciding on EU territorial cohesion: greater clarity on decision-making mechanisms is needed***

Sector policies and programmes that are not adjusted to other policy aims are an expensive luxury that the EU can no longer afford. The maximisation of synergies between different policies should be actively pursued, not as a fortuitous “icing on the cake”, but rather as an essential building block for a better future.

In order to achieve this objective, the adoption of an EU reference policy document on its own will not suffice. It is also essential to clarify the relevant decision-making process, including the respective role of the various EU institutions and the functioning of the so-called EU comitology (committee) system.

The European Parliament (EP), the European Commission (EC), the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) have already been deeply involved in the ESDP and TA 2020 processes. To date however, this process has remained informal in nature. Its main forums were ministerial meetings, held on an annual or bi-annual basis since the first meeting held in Nantes in 1989. The Council of the European Union has never met to adopt any formal resolution relating to the ESDP or the TA 2020. This was understandable as long as territorial cohesion had not been recognised as a key policy objective of the EU, but no longer makes sense after the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty. The time is ripe then for the Council to make formal decisions on various issues relevant to territorial cohesion. This should be done in close consultation with the four other EU institutions mentioned above, in compliance with the decision-making procedures set out in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).

Despite its informal status, the TA 2020 could be used as a reference or umbrella document in this framework showing how a territorial approach to the implementation of policies, e.g. such as the ‘Europe 2020’ Strategy, can improve their effectiveness. While a number of the TA 2020 document’s recommendations are intended for the domestic context many also relate to the territorial dimension of various EU policies.

At present the comitology system does not fit particularly well with the integrated approach to policy-making required to pursue a more territorial approach. On the contrary, the current system is characterised by a significant scattering of various consultative bodies, which is detrimental to the full exploitation of synergies between different policies. The establishment of new committees with a remit limited to “territorial issues” would not be satisfactory either, especially if no mechanisms are created to facilitate the integration of their work with that of other relevant committees and sector policies. Therefore, a comitology review aimed at strengthening policy synergies and streamlining consultation procedures on territorial issues should be conducted, ideally for the entire EU decision-making system and for all policies of relevance for territorial development. However, since such a process will likely prove time-consuming, a pilot action could take place in the field of the EU Cohesion Policy.

In the meantime, however, pragmatic solutions are needed to strengthen the territorial dimension of EU policy in the framework of the current comitology system. In this respect, the Structural Action Working Party (SAWP) of the Council has a pivotal role to play. The same comment applies to the Coordination Committee of the Funds (COCOF) and its Territorial Cohesion / Urban Matters (TCUM) sub-committee, which assists the Commission.

Depending on the type of decision to be made and the EU policy concerned, many more committees should be requested to pay due attention to the territorial dimension in the decision-making process in order to improve the likely level of achievement in respect of their own aims.

## **Strengthening the territorial dimension of specific EU policies**

A wide range of sector policies affect territorial development. They are also crucial in the promotion of territorial cohesion. This aspect has frequently been stressed in various publications such as ESPON studies, the 5th Cohesion Report and the TA 2020.

In this context the need to maintain dialogue with other sectors and to strengthen the territorial dimension in various policy fields remains a critical issue and one of the main challenges of TA 2020 implementation. Countless recommendations have already been made on this question but the results attained have remained well below expectations. As a matter of fact, a real structured dialogue has not yet even begun. Greater emphasis should be placed on genuine dialogue across relevant sectors. This relates to both the European and the national levels. Particular emphasis should be placed on those sectors which are closely related. EU Cohesion Policy should, moreover, receive special attention as the debate on the future of EU Cohesion Policy and its territorial dimension has started and provides a good opening for further dialogue. Thus far, the debate has primarily revolved around the potential usefulness of Territorial Impact Assessments,

but it may now be time to concentrate more specifically on actual territorial impacts in various sectors, while keeping in mind the relevant policy processes.

For a successful dialogue with sector policies to take place two main aspects need to be considered. First, the territorial impact of sector policies; this impact needs to be optimised, which entails in most cases a certain level of territorial awareness-raising. Second, the dialogue needs to be timed to accommodate the policy process of the respective policy considered.

***EU policies with a territorial impact and need for a new style of communication on territorial issues***

Several EU policies impact on territorial development. In Chapter III of the 5th Cohesion Report, dedicated to the interaction between the Cohesion Policy and other EU policies, a distinction was made between three categories of policies: those with an explicit spatial (regional) dimension, those which only have a partial spatial dimension and those which are ‘spatially blind’, i.e., policies which do not make such a distinction and can therefore be categorised as « without spatial dimension ». The box below presents these three categories.

It is not because policies of the third category have no built-in spatial dimension that they do not impact on the territory. On the contrary, policies such as energy, the single market or the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) significantly affect the geographic distribution of economic resources, even if they do not pursue spatially differentiated objectives.

Table 1. *EU policies as categorised in the 5th Cohesion Report*

<b>EU policies as categorised in the 5<sup>th</sup> Cohesion Report</b>		
<b>Policies with an explicit spatial dimension</b>	<b>Policies with a partial spatial dimension</b>	<b>Policies without a spatial dimension</b>
Competition Transport Maritime Common fishery	Research & technology Innovation & entrepreneurship Information society & media Poverty & social exclusion Employment Education Gender equality Health Agriculture Climate	Single market Trade Energy Economic & monetary union Lisbon strategy

An consultation of the NTCCP delegations has led to the conclusion that the following policies have contributed to the Territorial Agenda to a high degree: transport policy, energy and natural resource management policy, rural development, environmental policy, cross-cutting policies, policies of the regional and local municipalities, policy action by regions, climate action policy (Vati, 2010). The same study ranks transport policy, rural development, and environmental policy highest when it comes to national policy actions related to the Territorial Agenda and other territorial cohesion aspects.

To optimise the territorial impact of the various EU policies, it is essential to initiate a constructive dialogue between the various relevant sector authorities / administrations and those responsible for territorial development. Priority should be given to consultations at the EU level. A key-objective here is to integrate the territorial dimension in various formal EU policy decisions. However, this will not be achieved without a significant amount of preparatory work and informal consultations. In this framework, significant efforts in terms of communication, open-mindedness and mutual understanding will need to be made. For example, the “territorial cohesion enthusiasts”, who have been deeply involved for decades in the ESDP/TA process do not always realise that they ended up developing their own jargon. Outsiders, including those responsible for various EU policies, may therefore feel puzzled or discouraged by the territorial cohesion-related literature. To engage in a really interactive dialogue with these outsiders, it is of critical importance to let them make their point first, i.e. to spell out the main priorities of their policy agenda that are particularly close to their heart. Rather esoteric concepts of the planning literature such as “polycentricity” or “urban-rural relations” should be translated into more widely understood ones such as strong cities, accessibility to services, etc. This is necessary to fuel the policy debate. The territorial keys proposed by the Polish presidency go in this direction (Böhme et al., 2011, cf. Zaucha et al., 2012).

### ***Timing of EU policy processes***

As already indicated above, the question is then not just which policy to influence because of its thematic focus and territorial impacts. It is no less important to understand policy processes and to figure out what needs to be done at the right time to influence a policy. This is usually best achieved in the early stages towards the formulation of new policy agendas or programmes.

An initial screening of various EU policy timetables – as far as they are available to the public – shows that regional and agricultural policy in particular present considerable windows of opportunity in the immediate future, followed by the transport and research (Horizon 2020) policies (the policy debate on the 7th Environment Action Programme is however likely to take place at a later stage):

- The 2014-2020 EU Regional Policy programming period is at the time of writing in preparation. This is an opportune moment to advocate higher

territorial awareness, with particular regard to the menu envisaged for programme priorities and implementation activities. That includes the discussion of the draft regulations presented by the Commission, the Community Strategic Framework (CSF) presented on 14 March 2012, the national strategic reference documents, i.e. the Development and Investment Partnership Contracts (DIPCs), and finally the Operational Programmes (OPs). An intensification of the dialogue with key stakeholders at the European, national and programme levels should favour a strengthening of the territorial dimension.

- By and large, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) time schedule is similar to that for EU Regional Policy. This also provides a major opportunity to try to influence important policy processes which have already been initiated.
- In the field of EU Transport Policy the policy document for 2020 is being negotiated. The white paper “Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area – Towards a competitive and resource efficient transport system” was published by the Commission in March 2011<sup>vi</sup>. Moreover, a Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Connecting Europe Facility was published in October 2011<sup>vii</sup>.
- As far as EU Research Policy is concerned, “Horizon 2020”, the new Framework Programme for Research and Innovation is currently under discussion<sup>viii</sup>.
- In the field of EU Environmental Policy, the timetable for the elaboration of the 7th Environment Action Programme (7EAP) apparently remains to be clarified.

Perhaps less relevant but possibly still of interest are the following policy agendas:

- The European Commission adopted in December 2011 the Communication “Energy Roadmap 2050”. Further activities at the EU level are expected, e.g. an environmental innovation programme, or an action plan for renewable energy and a low carbon energy system road map. These individual activities may still be of interest in an attempt to strengthen the dialogue with Energy Policy.
- In the field of EU Climate Policy, a climate-proofing of the EU budget is expected and may also open up the notion of the territorial dimension for discussion

The Background Report of the Polish Presidency (see above) illustrates how the territorial dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy can be strengthened. This is just one example of how a sector policy may be influenced. In a similar way the other EU policies can also be scrutinised with a view to identifying possibilities to strengthen their territorial dimension and their potential contribution to territorial cohesion and the aims of the TA 2020.

As already pointed out above, the CAP follows a time schedule largely similar to that of the EU Cohesion Policy. As such, this clearly creates an opportune moment to try to influence the ongoing processes. As is the case with the EU Regional Policy, the setting

for the CAP can also be influenced from the EU budgetary, regulatory and policy framework via national documents and programmes on the selection of concrete actions. In the CAP debate the main emphasis should be given to pillar 2 focusing on rural development. In this respect, the study on CAP conducted by Project 2.1.3 of the ESPON 2006 programme as well as the work on CAP carried out under the TA Action Programme, can serve as a starting point for an in-depth discussion.

In the field of EU Transport Policy the “Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area” provides a very stimulating opening. ESPON studies on Trans-European Networks (TEN) and Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment (TINA), the work carried out under the TA Action Programme and the results of the first TAAC held in Namur in September 2010 on the possible contribution of transport policy to EU territorial cohesion can serve as the starting points for an intensified dialogue.

Furthermore, in a similar fashion to that discussed for EU Cohesion Policy, opportune moments for dialogue can also be identified in respect of national and regional policy in the EU member states. In order to promote a successful dialogue then, the aims of the TA 2020 need to be translated into the format and language of the policy in question and concrete proposals dealing with where and how changes might be possible must be identified.

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<sup>i</sup> Namely the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) adopted in 1999 and its preparatory versions (the “Leipzig Principles” and the Noordwijk first official draft ESDP – respectively adopted in 1994 and 1999), as well as the first version of the EU Territorial Agenda (TA 2007), all of which had already made a strong case for such an integrated approach.

<sup>ii</sup> Things are of course different for the third strand dedicated to interregional cooperation, whose main purpose is to promote the transfer of regional policy good practice among project partners.

<sup>iii</sup> NTCCP = Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points; created in Ponta Delgada in 2007, this network brings together the administrations responsible for spatial planning in the EU member states. The NTCCP spearheaded the elaboration of the TA 2020.

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<sup>iv</sup>Including: “Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU” (background document of the TA 2020), the 5th Cohesion Report; the First ESPON 2013 Synthesis Report. A study commissioned by DG Regio entitled “Regional Challenges in the Perspective of 2020 – Phase 2: Deepening and Broadening the Analysis” was published in May 2011 (available at: [http://www.oir.at/files/pdf/projects/Regions2020\\_FinalReport.pdf](http://www.oir.at/files/pdf/projects/Regions2020_FinalReport.pdf)), following the earlier publication of DG REGIO (2008) Regions 2020 – An Assessment of Future Challenges for EU Regions, Commission Staff Working Document, November. (available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/challenges2020/regional\\_challenges\\_climate\\_change.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/challenges2020/regional_challenges_climate_change.pdf))

<sup>v</sup> The NTCCP has already adopted a road map (“Roadmap towards promoting and enhancing an integrated, territorial approach based on the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020”). Some actions (e.g. an EU-wide survey on how Member States integrate the place-based approach into public policies on national, regional and local level) have already been carried out under the supervision of a dedicated NTCCP Steering Group. However, all those actions are still locked in the intergovernmental process and remain far away from the idea of a formal EU reference document.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/connecting\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/infrastructure/connecting_en.htm)

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0665:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>viii</sup> Cf <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>