



Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe

D1.2 Review of Discourses of Territorial Inequalities in EU policies

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Abstract

Introduction

“Territorial cohesion” is a peculiar, elusive and contested policy that has become part of the territorial construction or what authors have conceptualized as the “territory work” (see Moisió & Luukkonen 2017) of the EU since the late 1990s, in particular. Unsurprisingly, the concept has also attracted increasing attention in academic circles, particularly since the early 2000s. Consequently, the term discloses the ways in which EU policies and academic research on those policies and related policy terms (smart specialization being a telling recent example) are eventually co-constituted.

In this deliverable, we are not primarily concerned with the ways “territorial cohesion” has been conceptualized in academic research. By contrast, we examine the evolution of the definitions and justifications of the contested concept of “territorial cohesion” in EU policy-making. We underline that, throughout, “territorial cohesion” has been a manifestation of the political debates on the European social model and spatial inequalities and that its evolution mirrors some of the broader developments in the process of European integration.

The EU’s “territorial cohesion” policy is predicated upon founding ideas, knowledge-production and political rationalities. As a form of policy, it should not be considered a static blueprint but rather a dynamic and historically contingent process that is characterized by both relatively unchanged and more dynamic ideational elements and social practices. “territorial cohesion” may thus take different forms in different temporal contexts, and it is always open to re-definition.

The openness of “territorial cohesion” policy is an important aspect, given that such policy is inescapably political economic in nature. From our perspective, an analysis of the evolution of a policy should also render visible the ways in which a particular political economy is built into it. This is important given that “territorial cohesion” policy is connected to the channelling of public money in Europe. The way in which “territorial cohesion” as a “policy of investment” is reasoned, understood and debated in the context of economic growth, competitiveness and collective identity is a significant political economic aspect of European integration. It can be argued that the association between “territorial cohesion” policy and the political rationale of “investments” and “redistribution” – and their interconnections – has attracted little scholarly attention. This is regrettable given that “territorial cohesion” is, at heart, a political and thus highly contested concept.

We approach the EU’s “territorial cohesion” through careful scrutiny of public speeches made by the EU Commissioner of Regional Policy between 2005 and 2017 along with the 3rd to 7th Cohesion Reports. The aim is first to investigate how “territorial cohesion” is defined, before exploring which moral, ethical, or economic justifications are used for pursuing it and whether any temporal shifts (e.g. due to the economic recession from 2008 onwards) can be observed in the articulation of and justification for cohesion and territorial policies.

In other words, while interested in both the definition of and justification for the concept, this analysis more specifically addresses the question of the “territorial cohesion” of *what* and *why?* This analytic framework adopts the wording of one of the most distinguished authors on inequality and justice, Amartya Sen. In his book *Inequality Re-examined* (Sen, 1992), Sen noted that any analysis of inequality should begin by first asking which metrics or dimensions should be examined in a given society and second which moral justifications are used for pursuing equality. Despite a currently rather rich body of literature on the concept and practice “territorial cohesion” as the

guiding principle of the EU's spatial policies (Davoudi, 2005; Faludi, 2007; Medeiros, 2016; Mirwaldt, McMaster, & Bachtler, 2008), these questions do not appear to have been adequately answered.

Despite its origin in the political sphere of the EU, "territorial cohesion" nevertheless has a thematically close connection to academic discourses on spatial justice, uneven economic development and certain questions in economic geography, such as agglomeration economies and place-based development. Therefore, it is, in essence, closely related to the one of the most fundamental and perennial questions in economic and cultural and political geography – the reasons for and consequences of spatially uneven economic production and levels of economic development (Hadjimichalis, 2011; Martin, 2015; Massey, 1984; Myrdal, 1957). Within this context, the agenda behind the use of "territorial cohesion" as a political concept in EU policies appears to be to find justifications for the use of Cohesion and ERD funds that aim to (re)balance these geographically uneven patterns. The aim is thus to create EU territory which is spatially more spatially balanced, and it is on this principle that the existence of EU funding is justified. Consequently, the practice of introducing EU-originated spatial concepts such as "territorial cohesion" can be seen as a strategy for producing and legitimizing the EU's territory primarily as form of governable spatial unit.

The rationale for analysing public speeches rests on the idea that scrutinizing the rhetoric of European Commissioners for Regional Policy as a form of "persuasive communication" will reveal the implicit meanings of "territorial cohesion", which are not necessarily expressed in more official and formal documentation. Public speeches on the policies of "territorial cohesion" include both the ethos and logos typical of any political speech and also distinctive metaphors that can be used for predicative or ideological purposes (Charteris-Black, 2014). In general, political speech is defined as a coherent stream of spoken language that is prepared by a speaker for a specific audience for a particular political event. Political speeches typically present a deliberative form of communication aimed at justifying a specific policy or agenda, but they are also used as a form of consensus-building intended to establish shared values within the audience. Consequently, the concept of "territorial cohesion" as the guiding principle of EU territorial policies appears to be an excellent target for a particular analysis of political argumentation.

The "territorial cohesion" of what and why?

There has been perennial interest in tracing the meaning of "territorial cohesion", and as a result the existing academic literature on the concept is rather extensive. As is often the case with politically fashionable notions and ideas, the concept of "territorial cohesion" has often been taken for granted without critically reflecting on its content and varying political meanings. Many studies have used it in a descriptive manner – with pre-defined meanings for "territorial cohesion", territory, and cohesion – to describe and compare certain economic and social conditions in and between particular geographical contexts. However, a large number of publications have critically examined the political interests and dimensions associated with the meanings of the term (e.g. Davoudi 2005; Vanolo 2010; Faludi 2013; Van Well 2012).

One reason for the growing interest in "territorial cohesion" has been the view that adding "territorial cohesion" to the EU's strategies and treaties has provided new opportunities for rethinking and promoting the idea of European spatial planning, which had lost momentum with the fading political appeal of the European Spatial Development Perspective Document (see Faludi 2010a). Many of the contributions from the field of European spatial planning have either concentrated on the meta-level discussion of whether "territorial cohesion" ought to be defined

more clearly for policy purposes (e.g. Abrahams 2014) or on the genealogy of the concept, in other words, tracing its origins and evolution in EU-orchestrated policy processes (e.g. Faludi 2010b). However, there is also a branch of the literature that has attempted to capture the meaning of the concept in a synthetic way by categorizing its full range of possible meanings (e.g. (Camagani, 2009; Medeiros, 2016; Mirwaldt et al., 2008; Zaucha, 2015). Despite the rigorous and overlapping categorization made in the above-mentioned literature, however, little theoretical background seems to exist for the concept. This also highlights the fact that, at heart, “territorial cohesion” is a political rather than an academic concept. Its lack of theoretical content contrasts starkly with the neighbouring and thematically overlapping concept of spatial justice, which has rich theoretical foundations in the geographical literature (Jones et al., 2018).

Despite the mounting body of literature on the origins and meaning of “territorial cohesion” as a part of EU policies, there is no single definition for the concept in its current form. Instead, it can be attached to different spatial dimensions, such as disparities in economic production, forms of governance, and place-based policies (Camagani, 2005; Faludi, 2004; Medeiros, 2016; Mirwaldt et al., 2008; Zaucha, 2015). However, the framework applied in this analysis argues that while no single definition for the concept can be derived, scrutinizing its appearance and use in EU rhetoric may reveal the presence of a dominant or most commonly used definition. In other words, this will allow the definition of a hierarchical structure for its possible meanings instead of creating thematic and horizontal categories from all of the possible meanings. Thus, analysing the articulation of the concept in EU documentation has some benefits over the systematic categorization of different meanings attached to it. In sum, using political speeches as the research material in this analysis offers an opportunity to analyse the argumentation structure for policies aimed at “territorial cohesion” in more profound and nuanced ways than could be achieved with Cohesion Reports alone, which can be considered more descriptive documents.

As noted earlier, our analysis of “territorial cohesion” applies the analytical framework presented by one of the most prominent scholars on inequality, Amartya Sen. Sen observed that when attempting the task of empirically measuring inequality, one should begin by asking the questions of *what* and *why* (Sen, 1992). In the seminal book *Inequality Re-examined*, Sen asked *what* metric the egalitarian ideal should use to establish the extent to which it is realized in a given society. By contrast, the question of *why* considers the moral justifications which this ideal contains. Even though Sen’s thesis did not explicitly discuss the spatial elements of justice or inequalities, these questions can also be applied to the examination of “territorial cohesion”. Thus, when approaching the question of measuring “territorial cohesion”, this analysis first asks how “territorial cohesion” is defined in political articulation (i.e. what dimensions and metrics are used to define it), after which it investigates which arguments are used as the justification for pursuing it. In other words, we analyse *what* and *why* dimensions of “territorial cohesion”.

Data and research questions

The primary data used in our analysis are the speeches made by the European Commissioner responsible for regional policy. These speeches were downloaded from the Rapid¹ database, which contains all the press releases of the Commission. The database is run by the Communication Department of the European Commission, and all the material is freely downloadable. From Rapid’s search engine, those speeches made by the Commissioner for Regional Policy which contained both

¹ <http://europa.eu/rapid/search.htm>

the words “territorial” and “cohesion” were selected for analysis. This procedure resulted in a dataset of 69 speeches from the years 2004 to 2017.² This period included four different commissioners: Danuta Hübner (Poland), who held the office from 2004 to 2009, Paweł Samecki (Poland) from 2009 to 2010, Johannes Hahn (Austria) from 2010 to 2014, and Corina Crețu (Romania) from 2014 onwards. This period fits well with the research focus of this analysis, as it covers the period of burgeoning academic interest in “territorial cohesion”, around 2008, (Jones et al., 2018), as well as the period of economic recession from 2008 onwards. The period also covers three programming periods: 2000 to 2006, 2007 to 2013, and the current period: 2014 to 2020.

This primary dataset is supported by secondary data from the Cohesion Reports from the same period. Cohesion Reports are produced by the European Commission every three years to report on progress towards achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion across the European Union. This period covered five Cohesion Reports, from the 3rd (2004) to the 7th, which was released in 2017. Including Cohesion Reports as data in this analysis also enables the detection of any conflict between the cohesion reports and the argumentation in the public speeches of the chief executives of “territorial cohesion” – the commissioners.

These two above-mentioned datasets are taken to represent the full range of different understandings, definitions and justifications of “territorial cohesion”. These understandings are, in turn, assumed to reflect and reveal the guiding principles for the use of Cohesion Funds (CF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which have the strongest spatial or regional focus among the instruments in the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Our analysis below seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How is “territorial cohesion”, both explicitly and implicitly, defined and framed as a policy instrument in the research material?
- 2) What arguments and premises are used in order to justify its existence?
- 3) Have any changes occurred in the definition of and justification for “territorial cohesion” during the period under investigation?

Analysis and key findings

This section presents the results of a critical reading of the data in this analysis. The very first observation from the data is that, in the context of public speeches, the concept of “territorial cohesion” expresses its elusive and “spatially flexible” nature. The spatial flexibility of the concept manifests itself, for instance, in the ways in which it has been attached to various geographical scales and contexts, ranging from landlocked and peripheral territories to the increasing inequalities within cities and city regions. In other words, in the speeches of Regional Policy Commissioners, “territorial cohesion”, as a conceptual “chameleon”, easily adopts various shapes according to the audience to whom the speech is addressed. This metamorphosis follows the usual logic in political speeches, where it is in the interest of the speaker to first establish a relationship with the audience based on shared interests. Therefore, the appeal of the speech is based on the good character (ethos) of the

² The speeches by the current Commissioner, Corina Crețu, were not found on the database, so they were downloaded from her personal website at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/cretu/announcements_en. This search was performed on 27.2.2018, whereas the Rapid database was accessed on 25.10.2017.

speaker, resting on his/her practical wisdom, goodwill, and virtue (Charteris-Black, 2014). Thus, many speeches follow the arrangement and structure of classic rhetoric, where in the prologue the Commissioner already seeks to create rapport with the audience and also to arouse interest in the topic. Consequently, the definition of “territorial cohesion” in these public speeches has been tailored to the assumed interests of the audience. For example, in a speech made by Commissioner Hübner (2006a) in the 5th European Mountain Convention, she notes how

*“[t]he new cohesion policy for 2007-2013 creates the basis for further progress promoting territorial cohesion and the quality of life of our citizens in **mountain areas**”.*

In parallel, in an opening speech at the Annual Conference of the Association of European Border Regions, Hübner (2006b) framed “territorial cohesion” as a policy that contributes especially to

*“[c]orrecting imbalances by improving accessibility and connectivity of **landlocked and peripheral territories**”.*

Moreover, when addressing the audience at the World Investment Conference, Hübner (2005a) framed the core idea of EU regional policy with the remark that

*“[m]aking the regions attractive places **to invest** is what regional policy is all about”.*

These articulations are illustrative of the spatial flexibility of “territorial cohesion” as a form of policy and are certainly not exceptional. However, we argue that these articulations simultaneously point to the two most common ways “territorial cohesion” is connected to recognizing and tackling spatial differences and inequalities within the EU through two major dimensions: 1) territorial disparities in the economic performance of European regions, and 2) accessibility to services of general economic interest within these regions.

The territorial cohesion of what? The change in the meaning of territorial cohesion

An important milestone in defining and understanding the practice and theory behind “territorial cohesion” was the publication of a Green Paper on the topic. This document was the outcome of a public consultation round regarding the possible meanings of “territorial cohesion”. The Green Paper was precipitated by the question of whether greater efforts should be made to find a common and shared meaning for the rather multifaceted concept. In 2007 Commissioner Hübner (2007b) explicitly stated in that

“[w]e should try to have a common understanding of what territorial cohesion exactly means”.

However, in the same speech she also conflictingly noted that the launch of the Green Paper was

“[b]y no means an attempt to impose a common definition and a common set of instruments for its implementation to the Member States and their regions”

This contradiction reflects the ambiguous nature of the concept and also highlights its use as a strategic or “bridging” concept that is intentionally kept vague and undefined in order for it to be adapted and accepted by different Member States (Mirwaldt et al., 2008; Zaucha & Szlachta, 2017).

However, even though 10 years after the launch of the Green Paper on “territorial cohesion” not a single, explicit and commonly shared meaning of the concept exists, the use of different meanings can be teased out from the EU’s articulation of the term. As noted earlier, this could reveal the most

referred to or dominant meaning of the concept instead of simply creating categories of all of the possible meanings with which “territorial cohesion” has been associated.

Based on a reading of the speeches by Commissioners for Regional Policy and the Cohesion Reports, the primary meaning attached to the policy concept of “territorial cohesion” during the programming periods 2000 to 2006 and 2007 to 2013 thus seems to refer to the level of regional disparities in economic production expressed through Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The dominance of this understanding is unsurprising, as the central aim of the EU set out in the Treaty is to “promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment and to achieve a balanced and sustainable development”. The emphasis on employment is particularly telling, as it makes a direct link between “territorial cohesion” and the EU’s strategic goals, of which one involves achieving a certain level of employment.

Taken as a whole, the utilization of “territorial cohesion” as a component in achieving the EU goals of competitiveness and economic growth emphasises the economic dimension of cohesion. Moreover, throughout the programming periods 2000 to 2007 and 2008 to 2013, this dimension has been fixed on macro-scale economic production (instead of, for example, purchasing power or household income) and its most commonly used indicator: Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, throughout the data, references also appear to other possible meanings, such as multilevel governance (Hübner, 2007a), linking the concept to a spatial form of organizational structure benefitting from shared responsibility and ownership. Nonetheless, in EU policies, the focus on regional disparities in macro-economic production emerges as the most common definition.

The strong emphasis on macroeconomic production during the first two programming periods under investigation is not a surprise. At that time, cohesion policy was largely understood and articulated as contributing to the EU agenda of economic growth and competitiveness. This mirrors the findings of Mirwaldt et al (2008) and Zaucha & Szlachta (2017), who noted that since the time of the third Cohesion Report in 2004, the concept of “territorial cohesion” was strongly connected with achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda: competitiveness, innovation and employment. Thus, the rationale for “territorial cohesion” was framed as the agenda of narrowing regional disparities through increasing the performance of the regions in the new member-states in particular and in so doing bringing these new members closer to the EU average. Consequently, this convergence would raise the cumulative economic output of the new EU territory as a whole.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the definition and content of “territorial cohesion” were not defined *ex ante* based on a consultancy round among the different stakeholders; rather, “territorial cohesion” received its definition through the broader EU agenda of the time: it was understood to contribute to both economic growth and the geopolitical construction of territory on a supranational scale.

However, there is also a second category of possible meaning that can be read from the data that focuses more on an individual perspective instead of relying on indicators of macroeconomic production. This category defines “territorial cohesion” as a condition where

“[p]eople should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union” (CEC, 2005).

This more individually focused approach to “territorial cohesion” seems to have gained ground during the past few years at the expense of the focus on macroeconomic disparities between regions. In particular, this definition has its roots in the concept of the “accessibility of services of general economic interest”, which was first introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty (Article 7d).

This more individually focused definition of “territorial cohesion” has been clearly visible during the last few years, particularly throughout the current programming period from 2014 onwards. To some extent, the definition maintains the emphasis on the instrumental economic dimension; however, it switches the focus from macroeconomic indicators of production to the individual level. The emphasis on the individual-level effects of changes in macroeconomic context is also evident when Commissioner Crețu reviewed the 7th Cohesion report in Brussels in October 2017. Crețu noted that

“[t]he [financial] crisis has left deep scars on Europe’s socio-economic fabric . . . and in too many European Regions, people are poorer than they were before the crisis” (Crețu, 2017d).

The recent 7th Cohesion Report took an interesting turn in the definition of “territorial cohesion”. The report was divided into three sections, each covering one dimension of the cohesion progress: economic, social and territorial. In the third chapter of the 7th Cohesion Report on “territorial cohesion”, the focus was explicitly the environmental challenges affecting the development of the EU (such as greenhouse gas emissions) and, on the other hand, the efficiency of various territorial cooperation schemes. Interestingly, this section on “territorial cohesion” quite explicitly abandoned the meaning that had dominated the EU’s articulation of “territorial cohesion” during the earlier programming periods: regional disparities in GDP.

To conclude, the past few years have witnessed a change of focus from macroeconomic production to a more individual-based definition of “territorial cohesion”. This latter focus stems originally from an emphasis on access to “services of general economic interest” and in its current form is based on a “universalist” argument that people should not be disadvantaged based on their place of residence in EU member states and regions.

Finally, we also recognize a shift in the indices and indicators that have been used to render visible and articulate “territorial cohesion”. Even though for most of the period under investigation regional levels of macroeconomic production have been the dominant index through which “territorial cohesion” has been assessed, the latest programming period has seen increasing remarks on the limitations of Gross Domestic Production (GDP) as an indicator of development and wellbeing. More specifically, this acknowledgement of the limitations of GDP and calls for better indicators appear to have strengthened since 2010. For example, in 2010 Commissioner Hahn (Hahn, 2010) noted that there was

“[a]n inherent need to develop more indicators for different thematic approaches. For territorial and social cohesion we could for example look at household income per head, access to health care or education”

The concern about GDP as an optimal indicator for the results of Cohesion Policy was expressed again by Hahn in (2014), when he noted that

“[a]nother question we have to reflect upon is whether GDP should remain the main criterion for determining the needs and evaluation of the impact [of Cohesion Policy]”.

The criticism of GDP then seems to have gained even more ground during the time of commissioner Crețu. In 2017 she formulated this position with the remark that

“[G]DP, alone, does not accurately enough reflect the needs of a region as it leaves our crucial parameters such as quality of life, social inclusion or sustainable development”. (2017b)

These remarks pointing to questions of quality of life and household income also highlight the more individually concerned approach to territorial cohesion. In this line of reasoning, “territorial

cohesion” appears more concrete from the individual perspective than when associated with changes in macroeconomic production. However, it is clear that understanding “territorial cohesion” through an individual lens rather than focusing on changes in the macroeconomic context enables (and requires) a different argument structure. Consequently, different definitions are linked to different policy goals and thereby need to be argued on basis of different logic and lines of reasoning.

Why territorial cohesion? The changing justification for territorial cohesion and regional policies

The justification for “territorial cohesion” obviously depends on the meaning that is given to the concept in political action. For example, the rationale behind aiming for an EU territory with small (or non-existent) interregional differences in the level of economic production can be based on different arguments. More explicitly, striving for small regional disparities in GDP could essentially be justified on the grounds of either economic efficiency or possibly on the more theoretical notion of spatial justice. However, this type of logos (an argument based on reason) is seldom explicitly expressed in political rhetoric, but it can nevertheless be teased out from the data.

Our research material demonstrates that arguments of “territorial cohesion”, when understood in terms of regional differences in GDP, are based on a peculiar mix of calls for economic efficiency (leading to the maximization of EU output throughout the entire EU area), on one hand, and occasional and loose references to the idea of solidarity as a fundamental principle of the EU, on the other. When these arguments do not easily converge,³ the argument on economic efficiency usually prevails, whereas references to solidarity remain rather vague and undefined. In other words, during the first programming periods, from 2000 to 2013, when the dominant definition of “territorial cohesion” concerned macroeconomic production, the rationale of economic growth overshadowed ideas of solidarity or justice.

Making constant, although undefined, references to the idea of “solidarity” while discussing the moral grounding of EU policies is understandable, as solidarity operates as one of the fundamentals of the European Union, being one of its founding principles. However, as solidarity (just as “territorial cohesion”) is a rather multifaceted concept, its meaning is far from clear in the analysed material. Nevertheless, this ambiguity has not prevented its use as a justification for regional policies aimed at “territorial cohesion”.

The importance of the concept of solidarity was succinctly expressed in speech by Commissioner Hübner at the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion and Regional Policy (2007f), when she stated that

“[I] think we all agree that European cohesion is about solidarity and economic progress.”

By introducing the notion with the remark “we all” agree on what European cohesion concerns, the Commissioner obviously aimed to impute a sense of consensus for the later claims made in the speech. This excerpt also highlights the perennial struggle, both in cohesion policy and within the EU as a whole, to strike a balance between the ideas of growth and (re)distribution.

³ The apparent tension between the agendas of distribution and efficiency in the context of the “territorial cohesion” debate has also been discussed by Zaucha & Szlachta (2017, 35), Mirwald et al (2008, 15) and in more general by Doucet (2006).

This attempt to balance between arguments of solidarity and efficiency was also clearly evident in a speech by Commissioner Hübner (2008) at the graduation ceremony of PALLAS students during the opening of the academic year at the University of Essex. In this speech, Hübner quoted the words of Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Commission, while describing the dynamics driving the European Union:

“[it is] competition that stimulates, co-operation that strengthens and solidarity that unites”.

The logic behind the stimulating effect of competition and the strengthening effects of cooperation are quite straightforward, but while referring to solidarity in her own speech Hübner defined its complex connection to the EU’s economic objectives as follows:

“[L]ast, but not least, [it is] solidarity that unites. Increasing globalisation and a shift towards knowledge based economy could widen the extent of social exclusion in Europe. This is not only a concern of social justice, the unemployed and the excluded are a resource wasted for society. The European Union cannot afford increasing social polarisation”.

The rhetorical strategy of attempting to integrate the idea of solidarity into economic rationale becomes rather clear through this quote. In this line of reasoning, social exclusion, polarization and unemployment need not be addressed primarily on their own but because they present an economic burden which we (the EU) cannot afford. The similar logic of attempting to incorporate solidarity into arguments of economic efficiency is clearly visible throughout the data. For example, in a speech at the European Constitution and Solidarity Conference (2005b), Hübner, after stating that solidarity was a “basic value of the union” and that “the 10% of the population in the least developed regions contribute[d] only 2% of EU GDP”, went on to claim that

*“[t]he Commission believes that all regions **must** participate in the growth process and that the cohesion policy should be available to all of them” (Bold added).*

Furthermore, the pressing need for economic efficiency is reasoned on the premise that as the EU plays a relatively small role in the global economy, Europeans cannot afford to have regions “lagging behind”. For instance, in the same speech, Hübner continues by noting that

*“[T]he EU has 254 regions, yet Europe is a small continent. We cannot afford to waste resources. We cannot afford to leave behind even the smallest region. All of them **should** contribute to raising European growth and competitiveness” (Bold added).*

The assertion that all regions *should* contribute to economic growth is sometimes turned into claims that they have a responsibility to contribute to that growth. Moreover, the narrative of the EU being such a small player in the world economy that high efficiency is required follows the usual logic of arguments in favour of so-called austerity policies, whether being proposed on an individual, socio-economic or regional scale. In the Third Cohesion Report (Commission of the European Communities, 2004), the obligation of regions and individuals to contribute to growth is framed with the remark that

“[I]f the EU is to realise its economic potential, then all regions wherever they are located, whether in existing Member States or in the new countries to join, need to be involved in the growth effort and all people living in the Union given the chance to contribute”.

In this line of argumentation, it is interestingly these backward regions that should express their solidarity through better economic production, thereby contributing to the commonly agreed goals of “raising European growth and competitiveness”.

In this line of reasoning, the idea of the “territorial potential” embedded in the poorer regions becomes understandable as a rhetorical and conceptual strategy. Thus, another line of economic reasoning in favour of “territorial cohesion” concerns the identification of regions with underused or underutilized (economic) potential which should be harnessed for economic growth on an EU scale. Consequently, wording where “territorial cohesion” aims to unleash the “territorial potential” of regions has been present throughout the period. For example, Hübner (2009) asserts that

“[p]oor regions are underutilized resources that could be contributing to overall EU growth”.

This idea of underutilized potential being the reason for uneven economic distribution within the EU can be seen as a rhetorical attempt to merge the notion of the spatial redistribution of resources with that of spatially focused investments. Throughout its existence, the concept of “territorial cohesion”, and its manifestation in strategic funds, has faced the question of whether it is seen primarily as a mechanism of redistribution or investment. Even before the cohesion funds were explicitly defined as investment policy in the latest programming period of 2014 to 2020, the distinction between social transfers (which have a spatial or regional nature) and investment has been repeatedly argued. Moreover, this argument is omnipresent in the speeches of commissioners during that period:

“[O]ur investment in lagging regions is a high-return investment”. (Hübner, 2004a)

“[R]egional policy is not about hand-outs to under-developed areas. It is not a question of charity. Rather, it is about raising the long-term growth potential of regions, enabling them to attain a permanently higher level of development. It is about investing in regional competitiveness and jobs – in the endogenous growth potential of regions.” (Hübner, 2004b)

“[T]he structural funds are not designed as income transfers; they have the objective of funding real economic growth.” (Hübner, 2005b)

“[I] want to stress that this policy is far from being an instrument of redistribution or support.” (Hübner, 2007e)

In 2007, Hübner aimed to encourage collective self-reflection among the audience at the closing session of the Fourth Cohesion Forum by stating,

“[w]e should ask ourselves why the [regional] policy is still perceived essentially as a simple redistributive instrument” (Hübner, 2007d).

However, in the same year, Hübner (2007c) argued that a paradigm shift was occurring in the understanding of “territorial cohesion”:

“[n]ew policy paradigm is emerging in the globalised economy where public policies are increasingly geared towards resource allocation rather than redistribution. It is a paradigm in which the “catching-up” on the part of the less developed with the advanced regions is dependent on jointly moving forward. It is a paradigm that stresses opportunities for the future, by mobilising underexploited potential, rather than compensating for the problems of the past”.

Nevertheless, this paradigm shift seemed not to have materialized four years later, when Commissioner Johannes Hahn was still struggling with the old paradigm:

“[I] think it is high time to move away from the traditional view of Cohesion policy as a redistributive instrument, as a simple transfer of financial resources from rich to poor regions” (2011).

However, a few years after this remark, in the new programming period, cohesion policy was explicitly labelled investment policy in EU documentation. This was acknowledged by Hahn in the closing speech of the 6th Cohesion Forum:

“[C]ohesion Policy had to become a real strategic investment policy for the regions contributing to the achievements of EU goals” (Hahn 2014).

Hahn was so convinced of this paradigm shift that he proclaimed,

“[t]he mind-set of people has been changed. Nobody thinks anymore of Cohesion Policy as a pot of money to be given to the regions. Nowadays people appreciate and understand the investment philosophy of the new Cohesion Policy” (ibid).

The metaphor of a “pot of money” clearly represents the rhetorical strategy of attaching a negative connotation to the redistribution of public funds. In this case, the purpose of referring to Cohesion Policy as a pot of money was thus to imply negative evaluations of previous approaches to that policy.

Overall, the rhetoric used in the Commissioners’ speeches during the programming periods 2000 to 2007 and 2008 to 2013 seems to highlight the perception that acts of redistribution and investment are mutually exclusive. This idea has, however, been highly controversial in terms of the founding principles of the welfare state model, and by extension also the so-called social model of Europe, as early formulations of welfare states’ welfare policies were often predicated on the idea of “growth through redistribution”.

It seems that that arguing on behalf of investment has been of central importance in the EU’s articulation of the rationale for “territorial cohesion”. However, as analysis of the research material in this study demonstrates, the success of the marketing campaign for investments as the public image of “territorial cohesion” remains unclear.

As noted in the earlier section, however, the definition of “territorial cohesion” has become more individually focused in recent years, and this shift in the definition requires a parallel shift in justifications. In the more recent individually oriented definition, “territorial cohesion” is still premised on the idea of solidarity, but without the problematic attempt to combine it with notions of regional macroeconomic performance. For instance, Commissioner Corina Crețu argues that

“[c]ohesion policy brings European solidarity to each and every corner of the Union ensuring everybody has access to the same opportunities, wherever she or he is” (Crețu, 2017a).

In parallel, while reviewing the results of the Seventh Cohesion Report, Commissioner Crețu referred to this definition of spatially even opportunities with the remark that

“[m]ore than ever, we must keep fighting disparities, making sure each and every European has access to the same opportunities, wherever she lives . . . and must keep promoting economic development, social inclusion and equal opportunities in all EU regions”.

This new justification for “territorial cohesion” in the programming period from 2014 onwards is more closely attached to the ideas of solidarity and social and spatial justice, as it emphasises results that are relevant from the individual perspective. Thus, when attempting to establish a justification for “territorial cohesion” policies within the context of a more individually oriented definition, the Commissioner highlights physical results that are more visible to individuals living in the EU territory, including investments in regional infrastructure, such as broadband connections or physical amenities. It is important to note that these allocations of public money could very well be presented

either as investments or cases of redistribution, but this question is no longer brought to the fore. Instead, justifications for regional policies are made on the basis of their visible results. In other words, this still persistent tension between investment and distribution which dominated the argumentation on "territorial cohesion" policies in the earlier programming periods is not addressed from 2014 onwards.

The pragmatic rationale that regional policies create visible and positive results was expressed in a speech by Commissioner Crețu (2017b), who notes that

"[i]t [cohesion policy] works because it fulfils the EU promise of providing access to basic services to all EU citizens, from drinkable water to broadband, from waste management to decent transport connections, from schools to kindergartens to hospitals".

The amenity-oriented nature of Cohesion Policy was furthermore justified in a further speech by Crețu in the same year (2017c) where she remarked:

"[I] often hear the example of the bicycle path in Bavaria or the swimming pool in Portugal to belittle what the policy does. Beside the fact that it is intellectually dishonest to reduce the policy to these examples, I would argue that if the bicycle path is part of a strategy to promote sustainable urban transport and the swimming pool part of an attempt to improve the quality of life in a deprived neighbourhood, the policy has fulfilled its mission."

In summary, it appears that during the latest programming period, the definition of "territorial cohesion" has become more individually based, and the arguments for its legitimacy have changed. During Crețu's tenure, the justification for "territorial cohesion", and thus Cohesion Policy, has been built upon positive physical results for individuals, such as improvements in the quality of life and access to different services. However, it should be noted that these EU-funded improvements in regional infrastructure could still very well be considered the spatially targeted redistribution of resources; nonetheless, the debate over investments versus redistribution has disappeared from the political oratory of the regional Commissioners.

Conclusions and discussion

This study attempted to analyse the different ways "territorial cohesion" has been defined as the guiding spatial principle of EU policies, the arguments used for approaching it as a policy aim, and whether any temporal change can be detected regarding these two issues.

The analysis of the research material demonstrates that while certain ideas and emphases in the articulation of "territorial cohesion" have remained rather unchanged throughout the period under investigation, certain definitions and rationales have clearly been affected by (or originated from) changes in the broader political context and agendas of the EU.

Those ideas and conceptualizations that seem to have persisted in the EU's articulation of "territorial cohesion" could be summarized as follows:

- Territorial cohesion is a spatially flexible concept and is associated with different geographical contexts
- Territorial cohesion is mainly approached from an economic perspective, regardless of whether the emphasis is on macroeconomic production (GDP), household income or access to services of economic interest

- Territorial cohesion remains an extremely elusive and contested concept, and there seems to be little interest in finding one commonly shared definition
- Throughout its existence in EU terminology, the concept of “territorial cohesion” has been associated with references to the idea of European solidarity.

In turn, those ideas and conceptualizations in the EU’s articulation of “territorial cohesion” that display some changes during the period of examination could be characterized in the following way:

- During the programming periods of 2000 to 2007 and 2008 to 2013, ‘territorial cohesion’ was justified mainly as a means of strengthening economic performance on an EU scale
- In this rationale, seeing less developed regions as cases of underused potential served as a useful rhetorical and political strategy
- In the present programming period, a change can be detected towards a more individually focused approach emphasising spatially equal access to services and opportunities
- The rationale for this approach includes more references to the importance of the quality of life, better infrastructure and access to various services and amenities. These references however remain theoretically unfounded
- There seem to be some temporal shifts in both definition and justification of “territorial cohesion” but these changes seem to relate more to internal structure and organizing of the EU (such as enlargement of the union or change between programming periods) rather than reflect changes in economic contexts such as post 2009 recession.

The definition of “territorial cohesion” has contained two main strands. First, the conventional understanding of “territorial cohesion” has involved reference to existing disparities in the level of economic production between EU regions. In this context, “territorial cohesion” refers to a situation where some convergence has occurred in economic production between the EU regions. This definition was especially dominant during the programming periods of 2000 to 2007 and 2008 to 2013.

During the latest programming period, from 2014 onwards, the definition of “territorial cohesion” has shifted towards a more individually focused approach which particularly highlights accessibility to services, amenities and opportunities. From this perspective, “territorial cohesion” is framed as individual-level access to services of general (economic) interest or spatially even distribution of “opportunities”.

It seems clear that these different definitions of “territorial cohesion” call for different justifications if the concept is to operate as the guiding spatial principle for EU policies and as an explicit policy goal in itself. Regarding the first definition, which concerns regional disparities, the rationale behind aiming for a more spatially balanced EU has primarily been based on economic accounting, even though some references to the idea of solidarity do occur. In this line of reasoning, so-called “lagging regions” (i.e. below the EU average in GDP) place an excessive economic burden on the EU that threatens its ability to succeed in the world economy. Here, the definition of such regions as areas with underused potential has proven useful in order to secure the legitimacy of “territorial cohesion”. This rhetorical strategy contributes to the use of Cohesion and RDF funding (the practical expression of “territorial cohesion”) being seen primarily as an investment rather than the distribution of resources with a spatial or territorial dimension. This, in turn, reflects an agenda where cohesion policy is viewed as an integral part of EU policies that contribute directly to the aims expressed in the Lisbon Strategy. Thus, the struggle between the ideas of redistribution and investment is very much present during the programming periods of 2000 to 2006 and 2007 to 2013.

The justifications for a more individually oriented definition are based on more than the mere maximization of economic efficiency used in the previous definition. During the latest programming period, when the individually focused definition has gained ground, the idea of “territorial cohesion” is still justified by the idea of solidarity. In this line of reasoning, the aim of “territorial cohesion” is to extend the idea of “European solidarity” to every region of the EU in order to enable spatially equal access to services and opportunities for all. Moreover, in this more individually focused approach, the rationale for “territorial cohesion” is based on references to the results of EU funding that can be observed across EU regions. Interestingly, however, while referring to the physical results obtained from EU funding, such as better infrastructure, it is clear that the tension between investments and redistribution is still very much present; although this tension seems to have disappeared from the current EU articulation of the concept.

In conclusion, a clear shift to a more individually focused definition has occurred in the EU’s articulation of “territorial cohesion”, and this definition is also accompanied by remarks on the idea of (European) solidarity. However, as the concept of solidarity is as contested as “territorial cohesion”, the theoretical foundations or reasoning behind the idea of solidarity are not explicitly expressed. Thus, as the emphasis on regional disparities in economic production seems to be losing importance in the “territorial cohesion” discourse, some sort of theoretical and conceptual void is waiting to be filled. For example, the latter more individually oriented discourse seem to relate more on solidarity between people rather than regions but the spatial nature of this solidarity is not disclosed in the EU articulation. Thereby, within the new individually and amenity-based articulation of “territorial cohesion”, the question of how the idea of solidarity should be integrated into the guiding principles for EU spatial policies remains very much unanswered.

Consequently, this study argues that while filling this theoretical void, EU policymakers could pay more attention to the concepts of social and especially spatial justice in the relevant academic literature. Thereby, the future attempts to integrate individual-level experiences related to “territorial cohesion” and associated policies into the idea of solidarity could enjoy greater success than previous efforts to merge the idea of solidarity with the notion that “lagging regions” should increase their economic production.

Rhetoric integrating the ideas of solidarity and social and spatial justice could also allow academics, policy-makers and the public alike to participate more readily in regional coalitions of interest. Moreover, the renewed discourse on solidarity and justice in the EU articulation could be perceived as more meaningful and accessible at a grass-roots (individual) level. It would also allow connections to be made between demands for spatial justice and pre-existing struggles for other kinds of justice, such as those related to the environment and gender. This more individually focused language and discourse has the potential to be more flexible and inclusive, encompassing many different aspects of life and work instead of forcing every region onto a single trajectory based on assumptions of a direct and linear relationship between macroeconomic growth and wellbeing.

As a whole, the results of this analysis suggest that while the economic and political context within the EU has changed, a parallel change is also required in language, concepts and rhetoric. As this new language has yet to be fully developed, this report argues that while developing the theoretical and conceptual content for “territorial cohesion” and cohesion policies in the new programming period from 2020 onward, EU policymakers should give greater recognition to ideas of social and spatial justice. Theories of social and spatial justice could help provide more content for the notion of solidarity between individuals in EU regions. Furthermore, this approach could help spatialize the European Union’s social model in more effective ways, thus contributing more directly to the wellbeing and welfare of people in various parts of Europe.

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