

INDICATORS OF TERRITORIAL COHESION

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Abstract

In a world of globalization generating geographical concentration, relocation of activities, thus inducing territorial disparities, territorial cohesion has become a prerequisite for achieving sustainable economic growth and implementing social and economic cohesion.

The ratification of Lisbon Treaty represents the moment when “Territorial Cohesion” has been added as an official policy aim of the EU to its previous aims of economic and social cohesion. Thus, the process of defining this concept of “Territorial Cohesion” has become the task of the Commission and EU Member States.

Based on a literature review, the paper describes, in the first section, the polysemantic nature of territorial cohesion. The main objective of the next section is to address the main indicators, directly related to territorial objectives, that could be used to support policy makers in measuring and monitoring territorial cohesion related to European territorial development.

Keywords: *territorial cohesion, objectives, indicators, dimensions*

JEL Classification: *F15*

1. Introduction

Despite being a relatively recent concept, “territorial cohesion” represents a complex, elusive and ambiguous European notion [1] that intensively incited specialists in debates and discussions especially after the launch of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion [2] and its inclusion in the Lisbon Treaty, in 2009, as one of the main pillars of the European Union Cohesion Policy.

In a first step, this article, based on a literature survey and some relevant policy documents at the European level seeks to analyze different definitions of the concept. In a second step, it is discussed how territorial cohesion is understood starting from its own objectives and potential indicators.

2. What is territorial cohesion?

“What is territorial cohesion?” is, undoubtedly, the most important and most complex key questions of any approach, seeking to mark the limits of the latest aspect of the cohesion policy, a question that can receive interesting replies from different perspectives formulated precisely because discussing territorial cohesion means to measure various aspects of socio-economic life, and depending on what is measured, cohesion issues can be very different and very challenging.

The concept of territorial cohesion was introduced in the Commission’s second report on social and economic cohesion, arguing that ‘spatial balances could be conceived not only in terms

of GDP per capita but also geographically, that is by focusing on regions that faced particular challenges such as border regions, mountainous regions or islands’ [3].

The Lisbon Treaty represents the moment when “territorial cohesion” has been added as an official policy aim of the EU to its previous aims of economic and social cohesion. Thus, the process of defining this concept of “territorial cohesion” has become the task of the Commission and EU Member States.

While there is no official definition of territorial cohesion, it is obvious that, in time, the concept has complemented economic and social cohesion and that it is primarily concerned with promoting a more balanced development and ensuring greater consistency between social, economic and environmental policies.

The fourth Cohesion Report adjoins the concept to the goals of economic and social cohesion, diluting the territorial approach, but underlining the importance of “supporting a polycentric territorial development, the supply of key services to surrounding rural areas, a more efficient and effective public administration and the environmental protection” [1]. In the end, it is the Rotherham Declaration who interprets into territorial terms the aim of sustainable and balanced development.

Territorial cohesion is the expression of a balanced, coherent and harmonious development of the territory in terms of economic and social activities, endowments, accessibility and environmental quality, the existence of living and working conditions equal for all citizens, regardless their localization. Territorial Cohesion policy should aim at reducing disparities in development between geographical regions, between urban and rural areas, between center and periphery, and to prevent a possible amplification of territorial discrepancies.

In conclusion, territorial cohesion is the recognition of territorial diversity and the need to build on this diversity in order to generate development. Territorial cohesion relates fundamentally to policy coherence as it is related to territory; it is an added value of cohesion policy.

3. Objectives and indicators of territorial cohesion

In order to clarify the meaning of this new concept of territorial cohesion, on one hand, and to underline its correct indicators, we must say that we can speak about several important dimensions or territorial objectives, including: territorial balanced growth, territorial polycentricity, access to services/infrastructure, environmental sustainability, socioeconomic cohesion, innovative territories (see Table 1). Each of them were directly or indirectly delimited by the Green Paper or one of the six Cohesion Reports and used as a foundation to establish coherent key indicators useful in measuring territorial cohesion from the local to a global level [4].

Table 1

Objectives and Indicators of Territorial Cohesion

Territorial Objectives	Indicators
Strong local economies ensuring global competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labor productivity - GDP per capita in PPP - Overall unemployment rate - Old age dependency ratio
Innovative territories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Population aged 25-64 with tertiary education - Intramural expenditures on R&D - Employment rate 20-64
Fair access to services, market and jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to compulsory school - Access to hospitals - Accessibility of grocery services

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to university - Accessibility potential by rail - Accessibility potential by air
Inclusion and quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disposable household income - Life expectancy at birth - Proportion of early school leavers - Gender imbalances - Different female-male unemployment rate - Ageing index
Attractive regions of high ecological values and strong territorial capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potential vulnerability to climate change - Air pollution - Soil sealing per capita - Mortality, hazards and risks - Biodiversity - Renewable energy potential
Integrated polycentric territorial development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Population potential within 50 km - Net migration rate - Cooperation intensity - Cooperation degree

Source: Medeiros E. (2012), p. 15

On the other hand, the territorial cohesion related objectives set on the EU level (by the European Territorial Agenda 2020) are:

- promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development of the cooperation area, as an important pre-condition for cohesion and as a strong factor for competitiveness;
- improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises, as well as equal access to e.g. services of general economic interest, as an important precondition of territorial cohesion, a strong factor for territorial competitiveness and an essential condition for sustainable development;
- managing and connecting shared ecological, landscape and cultural values of the cooperation area, including joint risk management as an essential condition for long term sustainable development;
- reducing development disparities;
- ensuring global competitiveness of the cooperation areas based on accumulated strengths of local economies, as a key factor in global competition preventing the drain of human capital and reducing vulnerability to external development shocks [5] .

4. Conclusions

At the European Union level territorial cohesion represents a shared responsibility of both the Union and Member States, concerning not only the territorial dimension of the Cohesion Policy, but covering flows and connectivity, spatial nodes, maritime and terrestrial macro-geographic space use and organization, territorial assets.

Despite some rare comparable data available at regional level, this paper tried to make a conceptual analysis of several important statistical indicators, for each relevant dimension of territorial cohesion.

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