

**Review of Eduardo Medeiros et al. (2023):
Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion.
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The integration project of the European continent was launched after the devastating Second World War with the aim to prevent the repetition of the destruction of the continent. As a result, the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (in 1957) and the Treaties of Rome were signed with the main object to achieve peace and to implement liberalisation rationale among the members.

The neo-liberal economic turn in the 70s of the 20th century significantly altered the socio-economic environment around the world. Economic development rivalry between territories (states, regions, cities) started to dominate the basic principles of development and causing severe impacts, “*the limited neoliberal mainstream 'growth' rationale of regional, national, EU and global development strategies and policies does not necessarily benefit all citizens and territories.*” (p. 211.) The territory of the European integration was not an exception and it followed the mainstream strategic development path supporting the global development vision with elements of economic competitiveness, deregulation and free trade. Unfortunately, this neo-liberal economic logic amplified the rivalry by promoting ceaseless economic competition, hence deepening the uneven geographical and territorial developments. The less developed territories suddenly found themselves under heavy pressure 'to follow', or even 'to mimicry', the more developed players of the world system. Despite the strong efforts, often with severe social and environmental consequences, the regional differences have not disappeared, but rather they have remained an everyday reality even today. Moreover, the enlargements of the European Union, especially since 2004, have brought the less developed countries and regions into the integrating community, thus intensifying geographical, regional and territorial differences.

The uneven territorial development among the members and regions could weaken the integration itself, could undermine cooperation mutual trust; subsequently, the European Union was in a high need to propose a mechanism to alleviate the territorial disparities. This mechanism is the territorial cohesion and the cohesion policy. The impetus of a more cohesive and balanced territorial development is beneficial for the lagging regions and also for the dynamic ones, too, like establishing new markets and reducing the effects of pollution in metropolitan areas. Nonetheless, the book articulates the ultimate question, “*how can public policies promote territorial cohesion trends in an effective manner? This is the 'million-dollar question' of regional development theories.*” (p. 211.)

Subsequently, the idea of territorial cohesion was included into the basic treaties, specifically it was the Lisbon Treaty for the first time to explicitly promote a balanced and harmonious territorial development on the territory of the European Union. As Medeiros and Caramelo (p. 8.) note, “*EU Cohesion Policy was forged with the intention of promoting a more cohesive EU territory*”. However, despite of all the strategic attempts of the European Union, territorial cohesion has not been fully translated

into effective policy actions, thus it can be stated that there is a visible lack of strong and effective engagement from the EU to promote the vision of functioning territorial cohesion development.

Territorial cohesion mechanism has been in action for a decade and half and there are already some observations and conclusions. The book of Eduardo Medeiros and his co-authors, 'Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion', explores territorial cohesion, its achievements, its deficiencies and the role of public policies that aim to foster territorial cohesion. As the Introduction notes, the book offers a “*novel and more comprehensive analysis of territorial cohesion*” (p. vii.).

The basic structure of the book is divided into five parts. The first part debates the national public policies for territorial cohesion. Socioeconomic development and cohesion is the object of the second part. The third part addresses the topic of environmental sustainability in an age of global warming and pollution. Urban-related policies and cohesive territories are researched in the fourth part, while the final part of the book introduces two recognised processes of territorial development.

In the following part of the review, we are going to look at each chapter and give a short characterization of their content. The first chapter was written by Eduardo Medeiros and Sérgio Caramelo, they underline that the meaning of territorial cohesion and its policy relevance is largely contested. It has suffered many metamorphoses and has been a subject to systematic negotiations and “*it is still deemed to act as a mechanism of redistribution and solidarity.*” (p. 8.)

They attempt to give a short chronological explanation of the cohesion policy. The issue of territorial cohesion has been resonating for many decades within the EU policy agenda; nevertheless, it has gained more prominence since the 90s with ambitious aims to promote a balanced, harmonious, sustainable and efficient territorial development among the members of the European Union. The issue of territorial cohesion explicitly appeared in the EU documents in 2001 (in the second and third cohesion reports), but the real formal involvement was implemented in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The chapter describes the relation between the post-2000 EU mainstream strategic development agendas, the like Lisbon, Gothenburg, Lisbon revised, Europe 2020-2010 and their connections with the main elements of the territorial cohesion; moreover, it presents the EU cohesion policy phases and its main goals, thus allowing the reader to see the changes and alterations since 1989. The authors underline that for the first time, the five policy objectives of EU Cohesion Policy are in close agreement with the main dimensions of territorial cohesion and they conclude the chapter (p. 16.), “*only a few years from now can evidence be provided of whether this more comprehensive and holistic strategic vision for EU Cohesion Policy was effectively translated into a more cohesive EU territory at various territorial levels*”.

Paulo Neto, João Fermisson, Nuno Duarte and António Rodrigues analyse the introduced European Recovery and Resilience Facility, established as an initiative to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic consequences, whose mission is to provide financial support to member states in order to implement reforms and investments, thus mitigating the health, social and economic effects. The chapter aims to analyse the extent to which the new EU policies respond to social and economic challenges. It addresses the role of national policies to support territorial cohesion based on the EU Recovery Plan, it makes comparative analysis of the intervention rationales of the

Recovery and Resilience Plans in different states of the European Union, and it analysis the extent of the territorialisation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

Francisco Simões, Renato Miguel do Carmo and Bernardo Fernandes focus their research attention to the issue of social protection in Portuguese rural territories. The COVID-19 pandemic generated significant impact on societies as such; however, the younger generations were hit the hardest, namely they lost their jobs, suffered house insecurity, experienced increased risk of marginalization in rural territories and their future plans and perspectives have been profoundly questioned and undermined. The authors aim to analyse the inequalities of the younger generations before and during the pandemic crisis with attention on the social rights indicators of territorial cohesion, like equal opportunities, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. The research concluded (p. 61.) that “*Portuguese rural young people are struggling more than their counterparts in Portuguese cities, EU rural areas and EU cities*”. Consequently, the adoption of subnational lens by the decision-makers in defining the plans to alleviate the collateral effects of the COVID pandemic could be an added value; although, the groups of the most vulnerable young people, like the youth living in peripheral rural areas, were often ignored and neglected by states during the delivery of the mitigation processes and measures.

Oto Potluka and Lina Schubnell underline the role of civil society and non-profit organizations within the frame of territorial cohesion. These entities appear as key important players in contributing to (cross-border) territorial cohesion and in generating social capital through socialization. This means that the role of non-profit organizations is substantial in our everyday environment and they can fill the existing gaps and empty spaces, specifically they act in case of market and government failures and/or they successfully promote bottom-up solutions instead of heavily bureaucratized and complicated top-down approaches. The authors of the chapter formulated a research issue, namely how civil society contributes to territorial cohesion. Subsequently, the chapter looked at the Upper-Rhine region with involvement of France, Germany and Switzerland and researched the effects of non-profit organizations on cross-border cohesion. As the authors write (p. 75.), “*the results confirmed the positive role of bridging social capital on cross-border territorial cohesion*”, especially through accumulating social capital which is a crucial component of cross-border territorial cohesion.

Gavin Daly articulates a critical approach towards territorial cohesion mechanism, specifically “*cohesion policy must be understood, not as a benign response to deterministically imbalanced spatial development patterns, but as a necessary corollary of the EU’s growth-oriented policy hegemony.*” (p. 87.) The chapter articulates an idea that there is a profound need to move beyond the economic growth paradigm approach because maintenance of the accumulated economic growth for a long term is an illusion, hence there is a need for “*a fundamental transformation of the underlying growth-oriented epistemologies and ontologies that shape EU cohesion policy thinking.*” (p. 88.)

What is more, economic growth and the competitive logic is usually not a 'win-win' situation where both of the engaged parties might gain, but it is rather a 'zero-sum game' with resulting winners and losers. In other words, the logic of the cohesion policy is seriously trapped in an unspoken 'Sisyphean paradox' between cohesion and competitiveness, thus there is a widening gap between rhetoric and reality. The current 'place-based' cohesion policy with strong intra-regional competitiveness is unsuited to biosphere and life; consequently, “*cohesion policy must urgently abandon*

the functional polycentrism of 'place-based' thinking underpinned by the veiled ethics of profit-oriented market competitiveness.” (p. 97.)

Giancarlo Cotella continues the environmental approach and addresses the issue of environmental sustainability in an age of increasing pollution and environmental hazard. The chapter looks at the issue of sustainable urbanisation and underlines that a multi-scalar policy approach is highly needed because it could have the ability to successfully reorient European urbanisation dynamics towards a more sustainable path. This multi-scalar approach is a relevant idea since the regions of the EU are extremely diverse and every region is equipped with own specific characteristics and attributes. Therefore, what can be sustainable and workable in one region, it can be completely unsustainable in other regions, thus “*no one-size-fits-all solution exists to achieve sustainable urbanisation.*” (p. 106.) The author draws on the database of the SUPER ESPON project in order to present examples and to underline that there is a need for a thorough approach towards flexible territories instead of prescribed solutions.

Barbara Demeterova analyses territorial cohesion and its evolvement as a tool in urban and regional planning and she attempts to reveal to tension between the measurement-based, growth-oriented territorial cohesion on the one side and the aims towards spatially just and sustainable development on the other side. Despite more than a decade and half long implementation of territorial cohesion policy, unequal social, economic and environmental development structures are still visible in the European Union. This remaining uneven territorial and geographical structures principally question the effectiveness of uniform planning interventions (p. 136, 137.); therefore, “*there is the need to investigate regional inequalities beyond a redistributive understanding of a balanced development. (...) With present development measures not being able to mitigate the continuance of existing spatial inequalities across the regions*”. Implementation of territorial cohesion as a business-as-usual model is flawed and it needs to be remedied.

Subsequently, the author attempts to underline the need for reframing and rescaling the notion of successful development and sustainable spatial processes within the frames of territorial cohesion. Besides of economic and growth-oriented performance indicators, more place-sensible and more sustainable understanding of cohesion should be reflected, like access to resources, place-based approaches and community led development, vertical aspects of justice, participation, sharing of best practices, self-determination and power relations. As the chapter notes it, “*European cohesion policy is in need to move away from redistributive or compensatory logics towards more justice and capabilities-oriented, relational approaches to territorial development and planning.*” (p. 139-140.)

Joaquín Farinós-Dasí investigates the role of spatial planning towards the implementation of territorial cohesion. Multilevel cooperation and coordination from local to EU level is the appropriate approach to reinforce territorial cohesion and to promote harmonious development. This could evolve the process of development of new forms of governance, specifically, to propose a framework which could be a reference for the different levels and actors in the European Union instead of general-global common models.

Furthermore, the author underlines that our world is an eyewitness of new realities, we face with new problems and/or ecological challenges that lead us toward a new understanding of spatial planning. These new realities must be recognized and integrated into the frame of territorial cohesion, like the issue of digital connectivity, digital economy or energy transition, namely “*attention must continue to be paid to the relationships, still in evolution, between territorial cohesion and smart*

comprehensive spatial planning.” (p. 163.) In other words, more attention should be paid to the functions of development, coordination, prevention and correction of impacts, while each territory should utilise its advantage and specific characters, thus focusing on functional regions.

Martín Guillermo-Ramírez presents territorial cooperation as a pillar of European territorial cohesion and analyses the question how European Territorial Cooperation has contributed to territorial cohesion. Territorial cooperation and cohesion, with its already 'classic' territorial instruments, like Interreg and/or EGTCs, has generated a capital to bridge the gaps, to heal the 'scars of History' among the members by consolidating existing processes, generating trust and closer relationships across borders. Nonetheless, territorial cohesion and cooperation remain a hostage of national mainstream policies, goals, wishes and desires and it is embodied as one of the main confrontation fields among the member states and the European Commission. In reality, the answer is in cooperation and multilevel approach, as Ramírez notes (p. 185-186.), “*territorial cooperation processes, to be successful, need to count on the active involvement and complicity of the nation-states involved. In the end, it is about effective multilevel governance.*”

What is more, decentralisation and the principle of subsidiarity have achieved amazing progress within the frame of the integration project, pointing forward a new future, but the COVID pandemic with the implemented covidfencing behaviour and the unleashed war in 2022 have created an environment, where the European continent has started to reinforce itself through re-bordering practices and by strong domestic security governance practices, hence “*might have turn globalisation into a more nationalistic new era.*” (p. 193.)

Gyula Ocskay and James W. Scott write about cross-territorial governance via EGTCs. The EGTC mechanism, established by the EC Regulation in 2006, is a very successful tool for cross-border cohesion, because it becomes the direct agent of borderland. Institutional sustainability, reliability and legal personality of the EGTCs appear as significant added values, hence “*EGTC can effectively contribute to the Europeanisation of cross-national spaces.*” (p. 202.) The EGTC mechanism might fulfil tasks, like to mitigate border barrier effects and to valorise the territorial capital of the borderland, thus the EGTC is a cross-border tool with ability to promote integration, to implement projects and investments, to provide services, to (re)shape (spatial) perception, to intensify everyday practices of cross-border life, to develop new and more permeable discourses on borders, to reinvent functional areas and/or to respond cross-territorial place-based challenges.

In this chapter, the authors underline that the EGTCs played a crucial role during the COVID pandemic in mitigating the so called 'covidfencing effects', specifically, they gathered and shared information about borders, closures, simply they “*took their role of agency seriously during the crisis.*” (p. 205.)

We consider this book as a very valuable literature that builds on serious research work on territorial cohesion. The book helps to better understand the issue of territorial cohesion and it might influence the effective design of territorial development strategies. The book is primarily recommended for wide range of readers. Recommended for the academic community, for policymakers and practitioners in the field of strategic planning, development, urbanisation, cross-border cooperation and regional policy, and for the students of political sciences, public policy, regional development, European studies and international relations and for those readers who are interested in the topics of EU policies, territorial cohesion and regional development.