

Regional Aspects of European Cohesion Policy

Territorial Cohesion, Spatial Justice and Sustainable

Transitions in Territorial Practice



Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades
an der Fakultät für Geowissenschaften
der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

vorgelegt von

Barbara Demeterova

München, 29.08.2022

Erstgutachter:	Prof. Dr. Jürgen Schmude
Zweitgutachterin:	Dr. habil. Monika Popp
Tag der mündlichen Prüfung:	17.04.2023

For my mother, my loved ones and all who supported me on this journey.

Summary

European Cohesion Policy has gained significant influence on urban and regional development at different scales. Especially its third pillar, territorial cohesion, became central for the harmonisation of spatial planning across and beyond European borders. However, being also addressed as a policy 'black box', unable to navigate precise planning action, it gains its strength but also shows its greatest weakness by providing a canvas for differing projections. Current European funding has become an essential source in regional development, sought-after by territorial centres as well as peripheries across European member states and beyond. Considering the present academic discussion on European territorial cohesion, it remains largely unclear what the concept does in regional practice. Especially a more systemic, holistic perspective analysing the connection between local practices, heterogeneous regional processes and the wider discourse shaping dynamics is seldomly taken.

With an ongoing growth-friendly focus on regional development - polarisation, disparities and uneven spatial development are often being reproduced. Combining critical academic perspectives, the present thesis aims to contribute to the discussion on how to move beyond growth-related narratives, towards an inclusive and sustainable territorial development. Therefore, it traces the context-specific policy translations of European territorial cohesion while looking for opportunities to move towards spatial justice and sustainable transitions. Focusing on the actors, the regional processes and the European policy framing of cohesion, territorial and environmental development, the thesis analyses the Austrian, Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian border region by looking at three European Interreg V-A cross-border cooperation programmes.

Overall, using an empirical mixed-methods approach, combining stakeholder interviews, regional data and document analysis, the findings give deeper insights into the unequal development of border-regions while showing the different policy translations in line with regional needs. Furthermore, it identifies the need for alternative visions for regional 'success', pointing towards 'the right to not catch up' in the context of spatial justice and capabilities-oriented approaches to regional planning. Reflecting on current 'performance goals' directed development objectives in planning, it finally argues for a reorientation towards 'learning goals' instead. In conclusion, to allow for spatially just, green and transformative processes, there is the need to strengthen ownership, place sensitive and territorially just future policy frameworks, taking into account local mobilisation, learning and collective action. Thereby, the thesis adds new aspects to the interdisciplinary debate on European territorial cohesion and sustainable development, joining geographical research on European territorial planning, spatial justice and regional transitions.

Zusammenfassung

Die europäische Kohäsionspolitik hat erheblichen Einfluss auf die städtische und regionale Entwicklung auf verschiedenen Ebenen gewonnen. Vor allem die dritte Säule, der territoriale Zusammenhalt, hat wesentlich zur Harmonisierung der Raumordnung über die europäischen Grenzen hinaus beigetragen. Auch als politische „Black Box“ bezeichnet, die nicht in der Lage ist, präzise Planungsmaßnahmen zu steuern, gewinnt das Konzept zwar seine Stärke, zeigt aber auch seine größte Schwäche, indem es als Leinwand für unterschiedliche Projektionen fungiert. Die heutige europäische Finanzierung ist zu einer wesentlichen Quelle für regionale Entwicklung geworden, die von territorialen Zentren sowie Peripherien der europäischen Mitgliedstaaten und darüber hinaus nachgefragt wird. Angesichts der aktuellen wissenschaftlichen Diskussion um den europäischen territorialen Zusammenhalt bleibt jedoch weitgehend unklar, wie das Konzept in der regionalen Praxis wirkt. Insbesondere die systemische, ganzheitliche Perspektive wird eher selten eingenommen, die die Verbindung zwischen lokalen Praktiken, heterogenen regionalen Prozessen und den diskursgestaltenden Dynamiken analysiert.

Bei einer anhaltend wachstumsfreundlichen Ausrichtung auf regionale Entwicklung werden Polarisierungen, Disparitäten und ungleiche räumliche Entwicklungen oft reproduziert. Die vorliegende Dissertation folgt kritischen akademischen Perspektiven und will einen Beitrag zur Diskussion darüber leisten, wie man über wachstumsbezogene Narrative hinaus zu einer integrativen und nachhaltigen territorialen Entwicklung gelangen kann. Daher verfolgt die Arbeit die kontextspezifische, politische Übersetzung des Konzepts des europäischen territorialen Zusammenhalts und sucht gleichzeitig nach Möglichkeiten, sich mehr in Richtung räumlicher Gerechtigkeit und nachhaltiger Transition zu bewegen. Mit Fokus auf die Akteure, die regionalen Prozesse und das europäische Framing von Kohäsion, territorialer und ökologischer Entwicklung wird die österreichische, tschechische, slowakische und ungarische Grenzregion anhand von drei Interreg V-A-Programmen für europäische grenzüberschreitende Zusammenarbeit analysiert.

Insgesamt geben die Ergebnisse, unter Verwendung eines empirischen Mixed-Methods-Ansatzes der Stakeholder-Interviews, regionale Daten und Dokumentenanalysen kombiniert, Einblicke in die ungleiche Entwicklung von Grenzregionen und zeigen gleichzeitig die unterschiedlichen Übersetzungen der Politikmaßnahmen entlang von regionalen Bedürfnissen. Darüber hinaus wird die Notwendigkeit alternativer Visionen für den regionalen „Erfolg“ identifiziert, wobei auf das „Recht auf Nichtaufholen“, im Kontext von räumlicher Gerechtigkeit und fähigkeitsorientierten bzw. potenzialorientierten Ansätzen der Regionalplanung hingewiesen wird. In Anlehnung an aktuelle „Leistungsziele“ gerichtete Entwicklungsziele in der Planung plädiert die vorliegende Arbeit schließlich für eine Neuorientierung hin zu sogenannten „Lernzielen“. Dabei wird geschlussfolgert, dass, um räumlich gerechte, grüne und transformative

Prozesse zu ermöglichen, die Mitverantwortung bzw. Mitgestaltung stärker unterstützt und räumlich sensiblere sowie territorial gerechte zukünftige politische Rahmenbedingungen geschaffen werden müssen. Dabei muss insbesondere die lokale Mobilisierung, das Lernen und kollektives Handeln berücksichtigt werden. Damit fügt die Dissertation der interdisziplinären Debatte über den europäischen territorialen Zusammenhalt und nachhaltige Entwicklung neue Aspekte hinzu und schließt sich so geografischen Forschungsansätzen zu europäischer Raumplanung, räumlicher Gerechtigkeit und regionaler Transition an.

Acknowledgements

Giving me the opportunity of pursuing a doctorate at the LMU, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervising professor Jürgen Schmude. His openness towards my research interests, his strong support, mentoring and valuable feedback as well as his trust in my academic choices have given me the opportunity to develop to my full potential.

Furthermore, I also warmly thank my second reviewer Monika Popp for her huge support, her profound interest and her time for the review.

I want to also express my gratitude to my co-mentor Tatjana Fischer for her time, feedback, inspiring discussions and assistance during the last years. Having always an open ear for my ideas, her valuable support also made this thesis possible.

Furthermore, my gratitude goes to my colleagues from the LMU, who were there for me the past years, especially during the challenging times of the pandemic. I fully enjoyed the brainstorming, the fruitful discussions, the PhD regulars' meetings and all the mutual coffee, cake and lunch breaks. All of this helped me through tough times and I learned a lot from you, I am very grateful for having such an excellent work and team experience.

A big thank you also goes to my friends who helped me to get through all my ups and downs and strengthened me in times of doubt. Especially Maggy, Nicki, Laura, Marie, Deepal and Andrea, thank you so much for all the support you have given me and for all the good time we had - your strength has always inspired me. Thank you also for the numerous motivational talks, I could not have done this without you.

Finally, I want to thank my family and my partner who were my strongest support. You always believed in me and made me follow my inner beliefs.

Table of contents

Summary	I
Zusammenfassung	II
Acknowledgements	IV
Table of contents	V
List of figures	VII
List of tables	VIII
Abbreviations	IX
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Motivation of the thesis.....	1
1.2 Territorial cohesion, spatial justice and sustainable development.....	2
1.2.1 Development of cohesion policy and its territorial implications.....	2
1.2.2 Sustainability and spatial justice as frameworks for regional analysis.....	4
2 Study conceptualisation	7
2.1 Study design.....	7
2.1.1 Research objectives.....	7
2.1.2 Study phases	8
2.2 Data and methodology.....	9
2.2.1 Case region.....	9
2.2.2 Data and methods	10
3 Publications overview and summary	12
3.1 Overview of the publications.....	12
3.2 Publication summary in relation to the research questions.....	13
3.2.1 Publication I - Local governance and conceptual translation of territorial cohesion.....	13
3.2.2 Publication II - Regional development processes, spatial justice and sustainability.....	16
4.1.1 Publication III - The framing of sustainability and spatial justice in European strategy documents on cohesion, territorial and environmental development	19
5 Publications	22

5.1	Conceptualisations of territorial cohesion in Central European border regions.....	23
5.2	The right to not catch up - Transitioning European territorial cohesion towards spatial justice for sustainability.....	45
5.3	Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions.....	72
6	Synthesis _____	100
7	References _____	103
	Appendix _____	112

List of figures

Figure 1 - Case study region (own illustration).....	10
Figure 2 - Process of cohesion policy 'fuzziness' (own illustration).....	14
Figure 3 - Aspects of cohesive development (own illustration).....	17
Figure 4 - Framing of sustainable development (own illustration).....	20

List of tables

Table 1 – Research structure and publications	9
Table 2 – Methods and data used for analysis.....	11
Table 3 – Overview of the journal publications.....	12

Abbreviations

AIR – Annual Implementation Reports

AT – Austria

CBC – Cross-Border Cooperation

CEC – Commission of the European Communities

CPR – Common Provisions Regulation

CV – Coefficient of Variation

CZ – Czech Republic

EAP – Environmental Action Programme

eMS – Electronic Monitoring System

ESDP – European Spatial Development Perspective

ESPON – European Spatial Planning Observation Network

ETC – European Territorial Cooperation

EU – European Union

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GNP – Gross National Product

HDI – Human Development Index

HU – Hungary

INTERREG – EU programmes for Interregional Cooperation

IP – Investment Priority

MFF – Multiannual Financial Framework

NUTS – Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques)

OP – Output Indicator

PA – Priority Axis

PHARE CBC – Pre-Accession CBC Programme

RI – Result Indicator

SK – Slovakia

SO – Specific Objective

TA – Territorial Agenda

TC – Territorial Cohesion

TO – Thematic Objective

UNDP – United Nations Development Program

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation of the thesis

For more than two decades European cohesion policy has gained influence on urban and regional processes at different scales, becoming an element of interdisciplinary academic discussions. Being a guiding concept shaping spatial processes, geographical approaches started early to discuss cohesion in the context of territorial development and planning. Alongside strategic documents such as the Torremolinos Charter (CEC, 1983), the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC, 1999), the Green Paper on territorial cohesion (CEC, 2008) or today's Territorial Agenda 2030 (CEC, 2020b) the European territorial perspective solidified and shaped national and regional understandings of planning, redistribution and mutual responsibilities. Aiming for a balanced development of European regions, cohesion policy and especially its third pillar, territorial cohesion, have become central for the harmonisation of spatial of planning across and beyond European borders. With intensified discussions on fair and sustainable development, calls for a reorientation towards capabilities and more justice-oriented approaches in planning increasingly entered public and scientific debates (Pirie, 1983; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Harvey, 2003; Soja, 2010). However, territorial cohesion has only recently started to be explicitly addressed through the spectrum of a spatial justice perspective (see e. g. Jones *et al.*, 2019; Weckroth and Moisiu, 2020; Weck *et al.*, 2022), which rarely takes an actor centred focus. Given current social, economic and environmental challenges, a stronger justice and sustainability orientation in planning, beyond a mere 'meeting the needs' perspective, seems a necessary response. Therefore, this thesis is interested in the local practices, processes and overall development dynamics shaping regional responses.

A short introduction into the conceptual use of cohesion is given to allow for an understanding of its present orientation and significance for regional analysis. Next, wider reflections on spatial justice and sustainable transitions are discussed, before presenting the guiding research objectives, the conceptualisation of the conducted study, the case region and the research methodology as well as the publications for the present cumulative doctoral thesis.

1.2 Territorial cohesion, spatial justice and sustainable development

1.2.1 Development of cohesion policy and its territorial implications

Cohesion is a relatively broad concept, addressed by multiple disciplines without a precise definition to refer to. Looking at its societal meaning, the Collins dictionary provides a definition that serves an overall understanding by stating that “[i]f there is cohesion within a society, organization, or group, the different members fit together well and form a united whole” (Collins Dictionary, 2022). Being a very general scientific term it is not associated to a particular theory or school of thought, a given subject, level of analysis or academic discipline (Siebold, 1999). Addressed early in behavioural and social sciences, it can also be understood as a basic bond in groups (Piper *et al.*, 1983). However, with the evolution of EU policy, the concept of cohesion was introduced as a mutual guiding term to promote and support the balanced development of European regions. Codified in European documents, at least since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has set its objectives towards the “strengthening of economic and social cohesion” (CEC, 1992: 7).

Nonetheless, the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) early studies soon acknowledged that economic, social and spatial dimensions of cohesion are interlinked (CEC, 1991, 1995). Amid growing concerns regarding regional imbalances, the aim to reduce disparities between the levels of development within various regions came into policy focus (CEC, 1992), building the basis for its present understanding in spatial discussions. Growing interconnectivity between EU Member States, fuelled by transport and mobility growth, new communication technologies, the competition of the single market and the economic and monetary union, has led to fundamental challenges for national spatial development and planning. As such, these challenges were no longer separable from macroregional territorial debates. Referring to wider spatial dynamics, the CEC called for cooperative cross-border action early on to tackle the development of disadvantaged areas (CEC, 1995). Addressing the uneven spatial dynamics between old and new Member States in particular, the benefits of collaborating on spatial development issues across national boundaries received stronger recognition through mutual initiatives (Dühr *et al.*, 2007). This also raised the awareness for territorial linkages and the need for coordinated action as a precondition for cohesion. Growing concerns regarding negative impacts of factors such as globalisation, liberalisation and increased competition on the development of European regions finally led to the emergence of territorial cohesion as a central European planning objective during the 1990s (Nordregio *et al.*, 2007). Acknowledging the spatial dimension of cohesion, alongside economic and social cohesion, territorial cohesion was introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty (CEC, 1997). Although territorial cohesion was addressed from the second cohesion report on (CEC, 2001b), it took a while until it was also formally

included as third pillar of cohesion policy in the course of the Lisbon Treaty (CEC, 2007b).

With the spatial dimension of cohesion gaining influence in debates on European development it became understood as an opposing process to regional weaknesses and lingering disparities (CEC, 2007a, 2017a). However, less 'fashionable' at first, through being a mostly reactive and self-centred policy, concerned with the internal structure of the EU and to a lesser degree with a global perspective, it was often considered intangible (Nordregio *et al.*, 2007). Strongly combining notions of spatial development and planning from two diverging planning traditions, namely the French (focussed on territorial disparities) and the German (focused on coordinating spatial impacts of sectoral policies), further added to conceptual unclarity of territorial cohesion (Davoudi, 2005). Considering that the EU is bound to three principles determining how and in what areas it may act, namely conferred authority, proportionality and subsidiarity, it has moreover only limited powers to guide regional policy across the Member States (EC, 2022). With the policy's implementation bound to multi-level governance and regional coordination processes, territorial cohesions complexity encountered different regional frameworks across Europe. Nevertheless, being an important investment policy, it has significantly gained relevance in regional development decisions by providing financial instruments for selected European investment priorities. This is especially the case for economically weaker regions, partially dependent on external territorial funding.

Reflecting upon the academic discussion on territorial cohesion to date, a much discussed aspect is that the concept remains relatively fuzzy and vague (Dühr *et al.*, 2007; Faludi, 2007; Abrahams, 2014; Medeiros, 2016; Crescenzi and Giua, 2020). Lacking a common understanding it has been referred to as a policy 'black box' (Zonneveld and Waterhout, 2005) and accompanied by calls for further definition and greater transparency in order to assess its actual territorial impacts and added value (van Well, 2012; Medeiros, 2014, 2016; Zaucha and Böhme, 2019). Still, some empirical studies emphasized the essential, functional role played by fuzzy concepts. Arguing that, despite lacking conceptual clarity, these approaches can provide a plan and serve as a strategy to evade potential implementation barriers by functioning as a bridging concept in "which there is something for everybody" (Faludi, 2007: 666; Abrahams, 2014). Faludi (2001) identifies the advantage of 'fuzziness' in enabling planning concepts to become adaptable in different ways, working within existing or emerging policy frameworks. However, fuzziness also hampers the comparability of supra-regional interventions and planning coordination (Markusen, 1999).

Despite a number of attempts to clarify the concept by relating it to aspects such as good governance, regional competitiveness, sustainable and balanced development, territorial coordination and networking (Faludi, 2006, 2007; Medeiros, 2016), the challenge remains to translate the concept into an understandable, coherent term, guiding territorial action. Many

scholars focused their analysis on economic indicators due to the ease of comparison (Sala-i-Martin, 1996; Niebuhr and Stiller, 2003; Tvrdon, 2012; 2019), turning to economic models like the input-output analysis (Medeiros, 2016). Territorial cohesion was also addressed by using two essentialist models: the tree and the storyline model (Abrahams, 2014). While the tree model tries to generate composite indicators, defining the central concept and branching out across its dimensions, the storyline model analyses essential traits common to the concept in policy documents and its wider contexts (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Faludi and Waterhout, 2006; OECD, 2008). Though these approaches still appear to be dominant in the discussion on the understanding of territorial cohesion, Abrahams (2014) points out that conceptual definitions might be an inadequate method for understanding and assessing the concept in territorial practice. He argues, that these models are unable to explain what the concept 'does' in different territorial contexts (Abrahams, 2014) and calls for more pragmatic approaches and stronger context-specific studies.

1.2.2 Sustainability and spatial justice as frameworks for regional analysis

The academic discussion on sustainable development and spatial justice was strongly shaped through the postcolonial turn in the humanities. Thereby, after a phase of decolonisation, various academic debates started to address long-term structuring of global relations by colonialism, decolonization and neo-colonialist trends as well as hegemonic, Eurocentric and imperial discourses (Bachmann-Medick, 2016). This has spurred justice-oriented debates on the distribution of resources and power, as well as the (over-)exploitation of people and the environment. With that, the concept of spatial justice evolved and provided a motif for radical spatial thought (Barnett, 2016). Taking firstly a perspective on social justice, it was used to evaluate the distribution of wealth, personal freedoms and individual opportunities (Pirie, 1983). Since 1968 theorists like Lefebvre (1970) responded stronger to structural anti-capitalist struggles, calling for a just society. Addressing the role of equity in spatial development, geographers such as Harvey (1976) or Pirie (1983) followed these ideas and laid the corner stone for studies on the manifestation of spatial justice, building on Rawl's *Theory of Justice* (1971). Economists, such as Sen (1999), then prominently referred this idea as the 'process of expanding overall human freedoms', connecting it to the very ideas of fairness, equity and interpersonal well-being. Joining the interdisciplinary conceptual discussion, development and planning theories, like Fainstein's *The Just City* (Fainstein, 2010) or Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Soja, 2010), started to argue for two key positions shaping later discussions. Seeing the need to interrogate how space influences injustice (Fainstein, 2001), the first argument evolved around the notion that space is not a mere 'container' for socio-economic processes (Soja, 2011). Secondly, what is perceived 'just' varies across social space, therefore individuals and groups should be enabled to define justice for themselves (Storper, 2011). The concept closely aligns with the capabilities approach to

development, introduced by Sen and Nussbaum (Sen, 2010; Nussbaum, 2013), conceptualising development through what people have the capability to be and to do (Storper, 2011). Identifying the problem in the dominance of neo-liberal development approaches, capabilities and spatial justice proponents criticise the use of macroeconomic indicators like GDP to measure societal well-being and development (Boarini *et al.*, 2006; Kjell, 2011; Nussbaum, 2013; Davies, 2014). Challenging orthodox views on continued economic growth, this perspective also aligns with debates on sustainable development (Stiglitz *et al.*, 2010; Jackson, 2011; Petschow *et al.*, 2018), the environment (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996; Faburel, 2012) and de-growth (Rosa and Henning, 2017; Schmid, 2019; Hickel and Kallis, 2020). In the wake of these discussions, a strong environmental justice perspective has emerged (Sandler and Pezzullo, 2007; Pye *et al.*, 2008; Mohai *et al.*, 2009; Faburel, 2012; Schlosberg and Collins, 2014).

With sustainable development emerging as a policy goal, put on a global scale by the Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987) and further shaped by the UN's Rio Conference's Agenda 21 (UN, 1992) and the Paris Agreement's Sustainable Development Goals (UNFCCC, 2015), the academic focus on the interplays between processes and systems has grown. Nevertheless, keeping mostly a 'meeting the needs' orientation (Anand, 2007), development approaches rarely account for the social context in which individuals act in. Calling for a capabilities orientation in planning and development, some studies started to argue for a change of perspective, paying more attention to relational and agency-driven dynamics as well as to local empowerment (Fukuda-Parr, 2003; Lehtonen, 2004; Kurath *et al.*, 2018). With the emerging orientation towards transparency and applicability of supra-national policies (OECD, 2008; Barca, 2009), especially at the European level, a stronger context specific focus on regions appeared, increasingly reflecting on local actors and governance processes (Holman, 2009; Rutten and Boekema, 2012; Bachtrögler *et al.*, 2020). However, European development is steered mostly top-down through the Member States' mutual interests, structured through the EU Commission's position and strategy documents, with regional bodies having mostly an advisory role (Domorenok, 2009). Sustainable development as an explicit European policy strategy emerged in the turn of the millennium, with the Lisbon Strategy (CEC, 2001c) and the Gothenburg Strategy (CEC, 2001a) announcing 'competitive and sustainable development' as the two overarching development principles (Nordregio *et al.*, 2007). Aiming for "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (CEC, 2001c: 1) while simultaneously claiming that "economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand" (CEC, 2001a: 2), both strategies formed the present understanding that growth, sustainability and social cohesion can be achieved at the same time through appropriate policy measures and innovation. However, present aims for 'green growth', understood as economic growth and sustainable development at the same time, follow a rather contradictory concept, unlikely to lead towards just and balanced territorial pathways

(Schmid, 2019; Hickel and Kallis, 2020).

With the 'Europeanisation' of regional and urban policy, a shift in favour of (especially urban-)regional growth and global-local competitiveness solidified (Dühr *et al.*, 2007; Tvrdon, 2012; Rauhut and Humer, 2020). European key documents on territorial cohesion, such as the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) or the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (CEC, 2008), solidified the belief that economic growth spreads evenly from global to regional urban centres, trickling down to medium-sized cities, to finally spill over to their peripheral hinterlands. Nevertheless, as Rauhut and Humer (2020) point out, these are trajectories in economic thought. Agglomeration economies are increasingly cut loose locally, therefore lacking the expected distributional effects to their surroundings while at the same time fuelling inter- and intra-regional imbalances (Sassen, 2001; Luukkonen, 2010; Tvrdon, 2012; Mulíček and Malý, 2019). Considering present regional disparities (CEC, 2017b), it becomes apparent that spatial policies tend to overlook localised inequities arising from global market dynamics and regional competition – let alone finding adequate responses to pending environmental and climate related challenges. Inequity, and thus inequality resulting from the different access to resources, is strongly linked to spatial and environmental aspects and therefore challenges the balanced development of territories (Faburel, 2012). Therefore, dysfunctional growth dynamics continue to provide economic growth for some regions while failing to positively contribute to the wellbeing of others. European cohesion policy needs to move away from redistributive or compensatory logics towards more justice and capabilities-oriented, relational approaches to territorial development and planning.

2 Study conceptualisation

2.1 Study design

2.1.1 Research objectives

Given that the ongoing focus on regional competitiveness continues to reproduce polarisation, disparities and an uneven spatial development, the present thesis aims to contribute to the academic discussion on how to move towards more inclusive, just and sustainable territorial development. Considering that present discussions on European cohesion rarely address what the concept actually ‘does’ in regional practice, by mostly analysing only a specific case without taking into account its wider interconnections, a more systemic, holistic perspective, analysing the connection between local practices, regional processes and the wider discourse shaping dynamics is needed.

Therefore, the research objectives aim to (1) trace the regional policy translation of European territorial cohesion with a focus on the actors, to (2) look at the context-specific dynamics of cohesion policy’s implementation in a heterogeneous territorial setting and to (3) identify future opportunities to move towards more spatially just and sustainable transitions in European territorial development. The leading research question is branching out into three sub-questions, that are answered through the three thesis publications.

The guiding research question and its three sub-questions are as follows:

How is the concept of European Territorial Cohesion being translated into regional practice and what is the missing link to spatial justice and sustainable transitions?

Research question I:

How is territorial cohesion being translated into different EU territorial contexts and what are the dynamics accompanying these processes?

Research question II:

With the continuance of unequal social, economic and environmental development dynamics across Europe, can the spatial justice approach serve as an alternative to present perspectives on European territorial development?

Research question III:

What is the current framing of development and sustainability in European territorial policy and what is the potential missing link to sustainable transitions and spatial justice?

2.1.2 Study phases

The study conceptualisation combines an inductive and deductive approach, looking firstly at context specific regional aspects of cohesion. It then turns towards the overall dynamics shaping territorial responses. It is structured along three main study phases.

The first study phase focused on the regional *actors* through case-study research, using a multiple-case design and focussing on three European Interreg V-A cross-border cooperation programmes: Austria-Czech Republic, Slovakia-Austria and Austria-Hungary. Holding semi-structured interviews with selected national, regional and Interreg programme relevant stakeholders in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, the analysis firstly looked at the overall understanding and the different expectations regarding the territorial cohesion process in a cross-border development setting. To show the evolvement of the conceptual understanding over time, an analysis of written stakeholder feedback was added, collected and stored in the form of an online consultation (2009) on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion by the European Commission.

The second study phase was concerned with *regional processes* in the case-region. Therefore, NUTS 2 GDP data was examined to display the uneven development between national centre regions and inner peripheries between 2006 and 2017. Also, strategic implementation documents for the three Interreg programs were analysed, reflecting on a set of development priorities and their targeted regional impacts in the border regions. Coming back to the conducted stakeholder interviews, further aspects of the semi-structured interviews were analysed, concerned with the regional problem definition, implementation and stakeholder expectations for territorial cohesion post-2020. Through taking that perspective, regional guiding principles and actual development dynamics were discussed against the concepts of sustainable development and spatial justice.

Finally, the third and final study-phase took a wider perspective on the overall dynamics shaping regional development responses. It was directed towards the past and present funding period's *framing* of European cohesion, territorial and environmental development. Thereby, a framing analysis was conducted on selected European strategic documents and regulations. Assuming that a certain policy framing is creating specific understandings of what is considered as 'good development' and therefore unintentionally reproducing uneven spatial dynamics, the study asked for the potential missing link towards sustainable and just transitions in European regions.

Table 1 – Research structure and publications.

Focus on the actors.	Focus on the process.	Focus on the framing.
Publication I	Publication II	Publication III
Related to RQ 1: Analysis of local governance and conceptual translation of territorial cohesion in the case-region.	Related to RQ 2: Investigation of regional development processes in the case region and discussion of spatial justice and sustainability in policy implementation documents.	Related to RQ 3: Analysis of past and present framing of sustainability and spatial justice in European strategy documents on cohesion, territorial and environmental development.

2.2 Data and methodology

2.2.1 Case region

In order to show the local dynamics of cohesion a case-study research was conducted using a multiple-case design (Seawright and Gerring, 2008; Yin, 2014). To reflect on regional heterogeneity as a factor for the European cohesion process the area of the three Interreg V-A cooperation programmes (Interreg Austria–Czech Republic, Interreg Slovakia–Austria, Interreg Austria–Hungary) was chosen, representing the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region (see Figure 1).

This area stretches across four European Member States with different historical and development backgrounds. It unites an EU 15-member state (Austria joined the EU in 1995) with three of the EU 8 states (joining in 2004) in the course of the EU eastern enlargement. The region is characterised by high linguistic diversity and different spatial planning backgrounds (centralised vs. federal). Its regional history ranges from close cooperation during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918) to total separation (starting from the 1950s on) at the Austrian border during the Soviet era. The region was reconnected in 1989 following the fall of the Iron Curtain and started to interlink again due to the 2004 EU enlargement and the 2007 Schengen Agreement. Nevertheless, the borderlands are still mostly categorised as inner peripheries (ESPON, 2017) and characterised both by their long separation, and the challenges of rurality and low population density (except for the Vienna – Bratislava corridor).

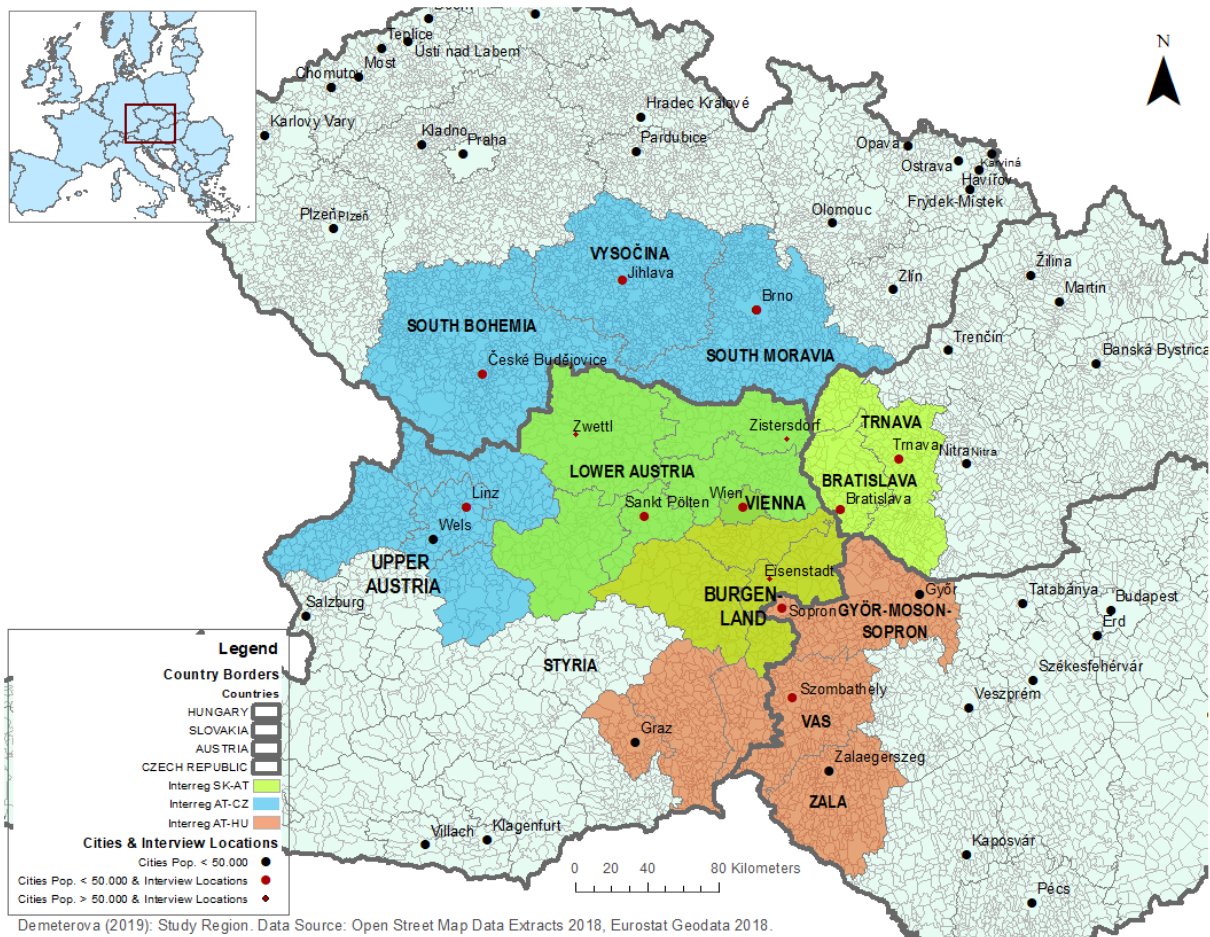


Figure 1 – Case study region (own illustration).

2.2.2 Data and methods

Given the different perspectives the study has taken on the case region, a mixed-methods approach was chosen for the present analysis.

The multifaceted approach combined literature analysis, stakeholder interviews, an analysis of relevant documents and regional development indicators (Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2006). Furthermore, a framing analysis on strategic European communications for cohesion, territorial and environmental development was conducted to give a holistic perspective on the dynamics shaping the regional discourses (Shmueli, 2008).

Table 2 gives an overview on the data used and methodology applied to address the three research questions.

Table 2 – Methods and data used for analysis.

Method	Description
Literature analysis:	Analysis of academic discussions on Territorial cohesion, territorial governance, spatial justice, organisational learning, regional transition and sustainable development.
Primary data collection and analysis*:	Semi-structured stakeholder interviews with National, regional and Interreg programme representatives in Austria, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary (n = 25) conducted in 2018.
	Regional development indicators analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EUROSTAT data (2019) of NUTS 2 regional development between 2006 – 2017 in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. - European ‘Country Fact Sheets’ on Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (EC, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d).
	Document analysis of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interreg cooperation programme documents (Interreg AT-CZ, 2015; Interreg SK-AT, 2015; Interreg AT-HU, 2018b). - Interreg programme implementation reports (Interreg AT-HU, 2018a; Interreg SK-AT, 2018a; Interreg AT-CZ, 2019). - Interreg evaluation plans (Interreg AT-HU, 2016; Interreg AT-CZ, 2018; Interreg SK-AT, 2018b).
Secondary data analysis:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Online consultation: Austrian, Czech, Slovakian and Hungarian written online statements (collected in 2009) on the national perceptions of territorial cohesion (n = 11), published by the European Commission (InfoREGIO, 2011). - Strategic European cross-border cooperation regulations (CEC, 2013c; EC, 2017).
	Framing analysis of European cohesion, territorial and environmental strategic documents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cohesion Policy Common Provision Regulation 1303/2013 and 1060/2021 (CEC, 2013a, 2021). - Territorial Agenda 2020 and 2030 (CEC, 2011, 2020b). - European 7th and 8th Environmental Action Programme (CEC, 2013b, 2020a).

*The interview data used for publication I and II were collected by the author and generated in the course of the Danube-University Krems research project ECONet – Economic and political development in rural areas (2017-2019) in cooperation with the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, BOKU. The research was co-funded by the Federal State of Lower Austria and by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, BOKU.

3 Publications overview and summary

3.1 Overview of the publications

The thesis addresses the research questions through three scientific publications:

Table 3 – Overview of the journal publications.

Publications	Publication Year	Journal	5-Year Impact Factor (2020)
Publication I Demeterova, Barbara; Goodwin-Hawkins, Bryonny; Fischer, Tatjana* (2020): <i>Conceptualisations of Territorial cohesion in Central European border regions. In: European Planning Studies; Vol. 28, Issue 12, p. 2287-2306. Reviewed, published.</i> https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692	2020	European Planning Studies	4.089
Publication II Demeterova, Barbara; Fischer, Tatjana*; Schmude, Jürgen (2020): <i>The Right to Not Catch Up - Transitioning European Territorial Cohesion Towards Spatial Justice for Sustainability. In: Sustainability, 12 (11):4797. Special Issue on Sustainable Territorial Development; Reviewed, published.</i> https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114797	2020	Sustainability	3.473
Publication III Demeterova, Barbara (2023): <i>Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions. In: Regional Studies, Special Issue on: EU Cohesion Policy towards Territorial cohesion? (Resubmitted. CRES-2022-0599.R1).</i>	2023	Regional Studies	5.444

*corresponding author

3.2 Publication summary in relation to the research questions

3.2.1 Publication I - Local governance and conceptual translation of territorial cohesion

The first article addressed the first research question, interested in how territorial cohesion is being translated into different EU territorial contexts and what dynamics accompany these processes. Taking an actor centred perspective, it identified a potential challenge for the policy implementation due to the lack of common conceptual understanding. With territorial cohesion being referred to as a policy 'black box' (Zonneveld and Waterhout, 2005; Faludi, 2016), unable to navigate coordinated territorial processes, it also pointed towards the lack of a widely accepted methodology (Evers, 2012; Medeiros, 2016; Dao *et al.*, 2017). Since scientific approaches rarely address context-specific aspects of territorial cohesion, the study examined how territorial cohesion is being understood and applied in a complex, cross-border setting. The guiding research objective, therefore was to assess regional stakeholders' understanding of territorial cohesion and its added value for regional development, reflecting upon the respective conditions that shape the territorial configuration of the concept.

The study focused on the three European Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes in the Central European, Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region. Choosing a multiple-case design, it aimed to account for the different regional dynamics in a heterogeneous setting. Tracing what the concept 'does' (Abrahams, 2014) or should do, the article examined the implementing actors' understanding and translation of the concept. Therefore, it firstly looked at selected national statements on the understanding of territorial cohesion, given in a European Commission online consultation (2009) by national ministries, regional authorities and NGOs in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. Secondly, it analysed the conducted stakeholder interviews (2018), held with officials from national, federal and regional authorities involved in all three Interreg V-A programmes in the case region, as well as additional representatives from ministries and regional planning agencies.

The results showed that the stakeholder translation of territorial cohesion is structured along three key dimensions, namely a relational, economic, and a social dimension. These three dimensions describe how territorial cohesion is understood and configured in relation to a given space, varying in different territorial contexts. Mirroring the long national separation within the case study region, in relational, economic, social and administrative terms, the 'added value' of territorial cohesion is strongly conceptualised along the relational dimension, as a precondition for economic and social cohesion. Furthermore, the results displayed that considerable disconnects in both the understanding of 'what territorial cohesion should do' and its implementation, persist at multiple levels. While regional stakeholders overwhelmingly

expressed the wish for greater conceptual clarification from the European Commission, they simultaneously benefit from the translation of the concept in accordance with their own regional needs. However, as a fuzzy conceptualisation secures territorial cohesion’s broader acceptance, it also tends to increase a policy language that refers to general regional processes. This fails to account for individual or collective action and responsibilities and thereby displaces the actors from the process (Callon, 1984). With intensified pressure to justify territorial cohesion’s ‘added value’ for territorial development, the search for comparable indicators intensified notably in the past decade. But, considering the different understandings of the concept and the often inadequate ‘one size fits all’ indicators for regional processes, the comparability of reported programme data was put under question. Especially in territorial contexts where relational aspects of cohesion are perceived as the greatest added value for development, the dominant quantitative indicators are unlikely to reflect the concept’s ‘softer’ practical effects in the region. Although more bottom-up, participatory approaches gained policy attention, the concept’s fuzziness is likely to suppress agency and causality and thus hinder actual change processes.

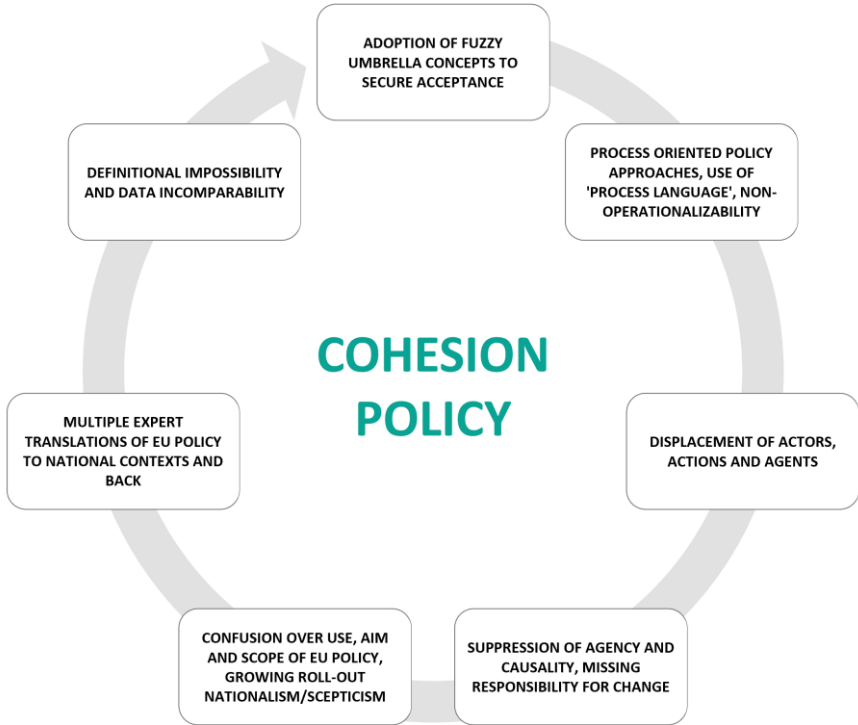


Figure 2 - Process of cohesion policy ‘fuzziness’ (own illustration).

Overall, the article concluded that multiple cohesion policy translations have produced dynamics that create a circular process through which the fuzziness of territorial cohesion policies is reproduced (Figure 2). Cyclical dynamics arise from the formulation of process-oriented approaches and lead to the displacement of actors, actions and agents, suppressing agency and causality. As confusion and scepticism over territorial cohesion’s aims and scope manifests amongst the actors, multiple expert translations into national policy contexts are generated, and

fed back to EU level, thus creating a persistent definitional impossibility and even more fuzziness. This cyclical process of policy 'fuzziness' requires the continued use of fuzzy umbrella concepts by the European Commission to secure territorial cohesion's acceptance, again leading towards displacement, non-comparable outcomes and an increased misunderstanding. This in turn is likely to also add to general EU policy scepticism.

Thereby, the article demonstrated the context-dependency of territorial cohesion translation and its continuous conceptual fuzziness in the case region. With a strong relational added value for the regions, the actors' perspective hints towards the multiple relational dynamics accompanying the policy implementation process, not reflected in present policy documents.

3.2.2 Publication II - Regional development processes, spatial justice and sustainability

The second article dealt with the continuance of unequal social, economic and environmental development dynamics across Europe, despite cohesion policy efforts. Directed at the second research question, it focussed on the processes in the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region and investigated whether the spatial justice approach can serve as an alternative to present perspectives on sustainable territorial development. Picking up on the argument for regional “right to difference” (Young, 1990), it reflected upon the spatial dimension of justice and the role of local capabilities (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Dikeç, 2001). Acknowledging that there appears to be tensions between measurement-based, growth-oriented cohesion logics and local development, the aim was to point out why current European policies seem to fail to induce sustainable transformations. Also, with the present green growth approach of the European Union through its European Green Deal (CEC, 2019), post- and degrowth debates served as a starting point for further considerations (Schmid, 2019; Hickel and Kallis, 2020). The research objective was to demonstrate the tensions of present growth-oriented policy objectives with regards to European cohesion and sustainable development, while also identifying actual implementation challenges. Choosing again the example of Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes, the article examined ‘spatial justice’ as a concept for European territorial development and sustainable transitions.

Methodologically a descriptive data analysis of regional development indicators was combined with a document analysis and stakeholder interviews. Looking firstly at comparable GDP data, economic territorial development between regional centres and peripheries was investigated in the case region. Secondly, strategic documents for the three Interreg programmes implementation, such as the official cooperation programme documents, the evaluation plans and the 2018 Annual Implementation Reports (AIR), were investigated to trace the focus setting and territorial processes in the border regions. Finally, coming back to the conducted stakeholder interviews, the overall regional problem definitions, implementation logics, and expectations for territorial cohesion post-2020 was assessed to include the local beliefs guiding regional processes.

The results demonstrated that the three programmes thematic focuses display similar development needs, although with slightly different priority settings for investments. However, when it comes to sustainable and environmental development, there appeared to be a ‘creative leeway’ to cover multiple, more performance-oriented agendas (e. g. tourism) under the same objectives. Nevertheless, the different implementation states of the cooperation programmes pointed towards more underlying heterogeneous regional dynamics not addressed through the AIR. With that, the reports seemed to reflect only limitedly on the programs’ success beyond the general programme performance. Moreover, the different evaluation approaches raised questions

on the general comparability of the reported programme data. Still, with all three programmes reflecting societal (well-being), economic (cohesion) and environmental (sustainability) aspects of cohesion, they comprised also clear justice and sustainability components while combining principles of action, integration and ethics for sustainable development (Figure 3).

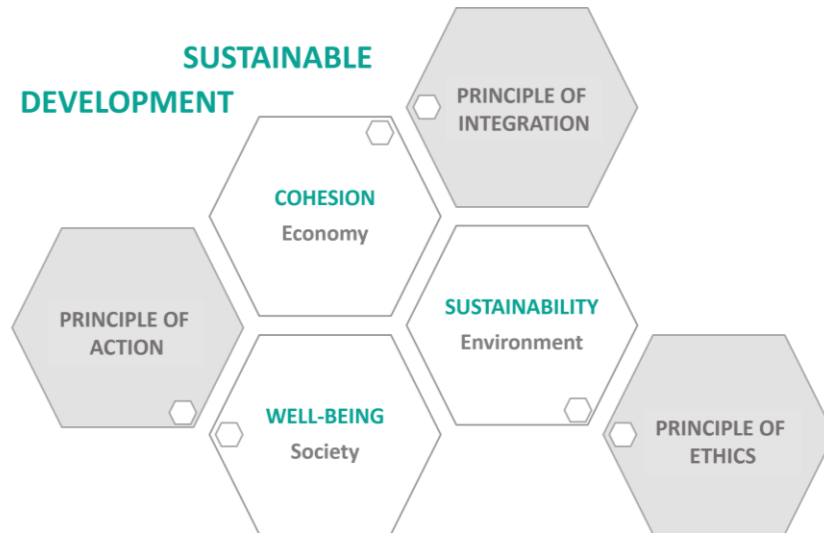


Figure 3 - Aspects of cohesive development (own illustration).

Overall, reflecting on the stakeholder statements, tensions between the current programme's logics and local capabilities for development became apparent. Picking up Nussbaum's (2013) critique on macroeconomic synthetic indicators to measure developmental progress, the article found that the current representation of development 'success' more likely allows the maintenance of the regional status quo rather than serving actual change processes. Taking into account the empirical findings, the study also observed a strong resource distribution-oriented logic of European policy aims, rather than a capabilities orientation. However, showing that regional diversity creates uneven territorial impacts, it illustrated the context and scale dependency of the cohesion measures in the analysed regions and questioned the effectiveness of uniform policy interventions for sustainable development. With present development measures not being able to mitigate the continuance of existing spatial inequalities across the investigated border regions, the analysed data indicated that using growth-driven approaches for development further fail to adequately capture all dimensions of territorial cohesion at the regional scale. More likely, the regional dynamics indicate a catch-up-driven struggle for locational competition. Proclaiming the 'right to not catch up' as a thought experiment that interlinks spatial justice and territorial sustainability, the study joined long-running critiques on territorial cohesion's implementation and measurement and increasing dissatisfaction with business-as-usual models.

The spatial justice approach therefore shows potential to better reflect horizontal aspects (e. g. access to and provision of resources) as well as vertical aspects of justice (e. g. participation, self-

determination and power relations) by focussing on regional capabilities. Supporting the right to difference, a spatial justice perspective would therefore better account for non-linear regional transition processes under a post-growth paradigm. The study thus stated the need for a reframing and rescaling of what is considered successful development for more balanced processes across European regions and detected a turn towards spatial justice as a promising alternative to present visions on sustainable territorial development.

4.1.1 Publication III - The framing of sustainability and spatial justice in European strategy documents on cohesion, territorial and environmental development

With the tendency of European cohesion policy to continuously turn towards growth-oriented answers to regional needs, the article critically looked at the framing of present discourses towards sustainable development. Building on the second article's observation that a reorientation on what is being considered successful development is needed, the study investigates European cohesion and environmental policy goal setting for territorial development. With European policy measures' steadily growing orientation towards performance, it joins Pike's et al. (2007) critique that this risks reducing social, environmental and territorial challenges to easy to address, measurable and solely technical questions.

Arguing that breaking free from outdated patterns (Beer & Clower, 2020) and adopting novel development visions, in line with dynamic regional and global needs, is a challenging task, the article aimed to investigate present development discourses in the context of territorial cohesion, justice and sustainability. With the need for collective action to tackle societal, economic and environmental challenges, it took an interdisciplinary perspective. Investigating Science and Technology Studies perspectives (Kurath *et al.*, 2018) on relational planning it also discussed Organisational Psychology perspectives on 'learning goals' (Dweck, 1986, 1999) and on 'knowledge for action' (Argyris, 1993), related to the mobilisation of actors and resilient development responses. The research objective aimed to show the current framing of development and sustainability in policy documents and addressing the potential missing link to effective sustainable transitions and spatial justice in European environmental as well as territorial strategies.

The study carried out a framing analysis on past and present key communications and strategy documents in relation to their framing of sustainable development in European regions. Conducting a qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2006) on selected documents, the study looked at European cohesion policy regulations and framework documents for sustainable territorial development and action (Common Provisions Regulation, European Territorial Agenda and the Environmental Action Programme). In order to demonstrate the framing process over time, former and current documents have been investigated, discussing both the past (2014-2020) and present (2021-2027) cohesion funding period orientation. Using the framing analysis approach as a conceptual and analytic tool (Shmueli, 2008), the approach, similar to discourse analysis but stronger practice- and comparison-oriented, helps to understand complex settings by dealing with power imbalances, differing perceptions, underlying values, goals and avenues of compromise (Druckman, 2004). Through a process of simplification, it filters perceptions and defines fields of vision on relevant considerations in the decision-making and action process. For

the document analysis, following Shmueli's (2008) categorisation, five central framing categories have been selected, namely, understanding, goalsetting, problematisation, solution/action and the characterisation of progress, to assess the framing of present development approaches towards sustainable development and justice.

The results showed that the first frame was strongly structured along understanding sustainable development either as distributive balance, spatial justice or systemic transition (see Figure 4). When it comes to goalsetting and prioritisation, the initial understanding of development guided the further framing process, revealing a focus towards growth and competitiveness, territorial integration and coherence and synergies. Though addressing multiple fields for action, the general problematisation was mostly framed through the lenses of territorial disparities, insufficient cooperation and coordination, or as a deficient knowledge and inaction. Taking the framing of mobilisation and solution approaches, the rhetoric was structured along the need for financial management, ensuring synergies and multi-level-governance as well as pointing towards a need for stronger knowledge and capacity building. The characterisation of progress, as the last category investigated, appeared to be framed along territorial performance, the territorial impacts, and the overall well-being of ownership-centred approaches to development.



Figure 4 – Framing of sustainable development (own illustration).

Overall, the documents, therefore, appeared to frame sustainable and just development either as a (i) management of resources, (ii) a coordinative task or (iii) as a process of taking informed actions. This understanding then further guided their focus on identity and value setting, the phrasing of goals, problematisation, process and mobilisation as well as the characterisation of development progress. However, to support a long-term spatial transition process which is, by definition open-ended, the article concludes that regional policy must reintroduce an emphasis on the 'means' (understood as the implementation dynamics and actions), rather than the 'ends', (the

regional performance outcomes) of policy measures. Considering the present societal, environmental, cohesion and health challenges, a reorientation from managing resources to fostering learning and collective action are being considered an adequate response for realistic, context and process-sensitive responses, where the change process becomes the targeted goal.

The article therefore concluded that taking a stronger emphasis on 'learning goals', instead of the presently promoted 'performance goals' in European spatial and environmental policies, would allow for a more equal emphasis on all three sustainable development frames. Rather than following a dominant management and coordination preference, 'learning goals' would open new perspectives on process, capabilities and collective action-oriented approaches to territorial development. By pointing out these findings, the article also argued that stronger learning-oriented approaches can serve as the potential missing link to sustainable and just transitions in European spatial policies.

5 Publications

Publication I

Demeterova, Barbara; Goodwin-Hawkins, Bryonny; Fischer, Tatjana* (2020):

Conceptualisations of Territorial cohesion in Central European border regions. In: European Planning Studies; Vol. 28, Issue 12, p. 2287-2306. Reviewed, published.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692>

Publication II

Demeterova, Barbara; Fischer, Tatjana*; Schmude, Jürgen (2020):

The Right to Not Catch Up - Transitioning European Territorial Cohesion Towards Spatial Justice for Sustainability. In: Sustainability, 12 (11):4797. Special Issue on Sustainable Territorial Development; Reviewed, published.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114797>

Publication III

Demeterova, Barbara (2023):

Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions. In: Regional Studies, Special Issue on: EU Cohesion Policy towards Territorial cohesion? (Resubmitted. CRES-2022-0599.R1).

5.1 Conceptualisations of territorial cohesion in Central European border regions

Demeterova, Barbara; Goodwin-Hawkins, Bryonny; Fischer, Tatjana (2020): Conceptualisations of Territorial Cohesion in Central European border regions. In: *European Planning Studies*; Vol. 28, Issue 12, p. 2287-2306.

The first article was published in 2020 in the Taylor and Francis Journal *European Planning Studies* and addressed the first research question while paving the ground for the following research.

Author contributions: Conceptualisation, B.D.; T.F.; B.G.H; methodology, B.D.; software B.D.; validation, B.D; formal analysis, B.D.; investigation, B.D.; resources, B.D. and T.F.; writing—original draft preparation, B.D.; writing—review and editing, B.D., T.F. and B.G.H.; visualization, B.D.; supervision, T.F.; project administration, B.D.; funding acquisition, B.D. and T.F.

This is an 'Author's Accepted Manuscript (AM)/Author's Original Manuscript' of an article published by Taylor & Francis Group in European Planning Studies on 20 January 2020, available online: <https://www.tandfonline.com/> [<https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692>].



Conceptualisations of Territorial Cohesion in Central European border regions

Barbara Demeterova, Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins & Tatjana Fischer

To cite this article: Barbara Demeterova, Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins & Tatjana Fischer (2020): Conceptualisations of Territorial Cohesion in Central European border regions, *European Planning Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692](https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692>



Published online: 20 Jan 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

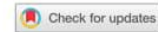


View related articles [↗](#)






View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ceps20>



Conceptualisations of Territorial Cohesion in Central European border regions

Barbara Demeterova ^a, Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins ^b and Tatjana Fischer ^c

^aDepartment of Geography, Chair for Economic Geography and Tourism Research, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Munich, Germany; ^bDepartment of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, Wales; ^cInstitute of Spatial Planning, Environmental Planning and Land Rearrangement (IRUB), Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

Despite decades of spending, Cohesion Policy appears unable to fully address growing national disparities and increasing 'roll-out' nationalism. In the present study we discuss regional effects of 'fuzzy' policy concepts, such as EU's policy for Territorial Cohesion, in Central European borderlands from a stakeholder perspective. Identifying how key policy documents have framed the discussion of Territorial Cohesion, we furthermore demonstrate the differing ways regional stakeholders have interpreted this vision. By showing how multiple translations have produced dynamics that create a circular process, we conclude that this process leads towards non-comparable outcomes, increased misunderstanding, while fuelling EU scepticism.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 December 2019
Revised 4 January 2020
Accepted 6 January 2020

KEYWORDS

European Territorial Cohesion; INTERREG cross-border cooperation; policy Transfer; regional dynamics; Central Europe

Introduction

Overcoming the challenge of uneven development and boosting economic growth has long been seen as crucial to the European project. Through Cohesion Policy, the EU has long promised to 'give to the people of Europe [a] unique blend of economic well-being, social cohesiveness and high overall quality of life' (CEC, 1994, p. 1). Nevertheless, growing inter-regional socio-economic disparities across Europe (CEC, 2017b) have left some places 'behind' and perhaps 'fuelled their revenge' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) through populist politics and rising anti-EU nationalism. In regions where Cohesion's positive rhetoric smacks into the lived realities of unemployment and deprivation, 'What has the EU done for us?' expresses the socio-political zeitgeist. In such a divisive context, Cohesion's third pillar, Territorial Cohesion, is ever more crucial to the European project.

Since first appearing in the Treaty of Amsterdam (CEC, 1997), Territorial Cohesion has, however, turned into a kind of policy 'black box' (Zonneveld & Waterhout, 2005, p. 15) – its conceptual implications growing ever wider without common understanding being reached (Abrahams, 2014; Dao, Plagnat Cantoreggi, & Rousseaux, 2017; Evers, 2012). Scholars have debated the merits of keeping Territorial Cohesion a 'fuzzy'

CONTACT Tatjana Fischer  tatjana.fischer@boku.ac.at  Institute of Spatial Planning, Environmental Planning and Land Rearrangement (IRUB), Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Peter Jordan Straße 82, Vienna A-1190, Austria

© 2020 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

concept (Waterhout, 2002) ‘in which there is something for everybody’ (Faludi, 2006, p. 668). Others advocate for definition (Medeiros, 2016) and practical operationalization (Dao et al., 2017). Abrahams (2014) sums up these different perspectives as what Territorial Cohesion ‘does’ versus what Territorial Cohesion ‘is’. Although, as Abrahams (2014, p. 2136) argues, Territorial Cohesion has already been operationalized in multiple ways within various frameworks, we question the presumption that diverse, multi-scalar operationalisations will produce outcomes that can be *a posteriori* recognized as ‘Territorial Cohesion’.

Given that member states and regions almost inevitably understand Territorial Cohesion in ways that suit their own agendas (van Well, 2012), borders particularly mark the fractures where one understanding abuts another. With 40% of EU territory classified as border regions (CEC, 2017a, p. 2) and sharp divides lingering between old and new member states, national borders present a considerable challenge to cohesion processes. Nevertheless, little research has investigated the policy’s handling and evolution in practice and, according to Faludi (2016, p. 3), few national policy impact assessments adequately address cross-border cohesion between national territories.

This paper aims therefore to examine how Territorial Cohesion is understood and applied in regional development policies in a cross-border context. Taking an actor-centred perspective to illustrate the dynamics accompanying policy implementation, we build our case through empirical reference to three European INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes in the Central European Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region. Based on insights from regional studies literature, we follow a mixed-methods approach, analysing EU regional policy documents, official stakeholder comments made on the 2009 Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, and expert interviews conducted with INTERREG programme representatives and regional stakeholders in the case-study region.

Through asking, ‘*how is Territorial Cohesion being translated?*’ into different EU territorial contexts and ‘*what are the dynamics accompanying these processes?*’ we contribute to debate on the spatial dimensions of Cohesion. In contrast to previous interventions, which have directed attention to single aspects of the policy process, we take a holistic perspective, demonstrating the tensions between EU policy making and regional implementation. We identify ‘fuzzy’ conceptualization (Medeiros, 2016) as both the start and end point of a cyclical process that, we argue, mitigates against sustainable outcomes for regional development. By examining how key EU policy documents have framed the discussion on Territorial Cohesion and analysing the differing ways regional stakeholders interpret this vision, we illustrate how different understandings of the concept continually reproduce ‘fuzziness’, leading to incomparable outcomes and increased misunderstanding, which increases the risk of further fuelling negative attitudes towards the EU.

The structure of the article is as follows. We begin with an overview of Territorial Cohesion and European cross-border cooperation literature, before introducing the case-study region. We then describe our data and methodology. The empirical sections first examine key EU policy documents on Territorial Cohesion before analysing the differing ways regional stakeholders interpret the concept. Finally, the discussion displays the dynamics of the circular process we limn, before concluding on the dynamics of Territorial Cohesion policy in practice.

Literature review

The absence of a common understanding in European Territorial Cohesion policy

The Maastricht Treaty's Article 130a sets an early agenda to reduce disparities in 'levels of development' between European regions (CEC, 1992). So-called 'lagging' regions were especially perceived to threaten Europe's competitiveness and to financially burden net-paying states (Jones et al., 2019). Territorial Cohesion has since been placed under the Europe 2020 strategy's 'inclusive growth priority' (CEC, 2010, p. 3) – yet the strategy still suggests that the EU follows 'a "growth" rather than a "development" narrative' (Medeiros, 2016, p. 5). Following this growth-driven perspective, the Commission measures Territorial Cohesion by comparing regional GDP data at NUTS 2 level (territorial units with an average population size between 8,00,000 and 3 million), creating a map of 'winner' and 'loser' regions, that is unlikely to change in the future due to the steadily growing rural-urban divide (ESPON, 2017; Schoene, 2019).

Yet, while territorial cohesion has gained official status in policy documents and practical application through GDP, explicit guidelines for the concept's implementation have never been developed (Medeiros, 2016, p. 4). With spatial planning outside EU competence, and resistance from member states towards centralized regulations, binding territorial development strategies were never the object of wider EU initiatives (Faludi, 2016, p. 3). Hence, Territorial Cohesion remains a contested term. Mirwaldt, McMaster, and Bachtler (2008, p. v) observe both an underlying disagreement *between* the Commission and the member states, and differing views *among* the member states. Meanwhile, academic literature on Territorial Cohesion has been strongly oriented towards operationalizing the concept and evaluating the measurable 'added value' to European territories (see e.g. Begg, 2010; Dao et al., 2017; Mairate, 2006; Medeiros, 2014; Medeiros, 2017; van Well, 2012; Zaucha & Böhme, 2019). Nevertheless, attempts to develop a common understanding have not proved successful and the policy's regional application remains open to interpretation.

Hence lacking definition, Territorial Cohesion appears as a classic 'fuzzy concept' – one which 'posits an entity, phenomenon or process which possesses two or more alternative meanings and thus cannot be reliably identified or applied' (1999, p. 870). Fuzzy concepts commonly appear in international policies, with Markusen identifying over-emphasis on the 'process, rather than [the] structure, agency and performance' accompanying complex policy issues (ibid.). Although Markusen cautions against fuzzy concepts, certain terms do 'gain their purchase and power through ... their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings' (Cornwall, 2007, p. 472). Some empirical studies therefore emphasize the generative function of 'fuzziness' (Abrahams, 2014, p. 2135; Faludi, 2007, p. 666), which enables concepts to be adapted to other existing or emerging policy frameworks (Faludi, 2001). In EU policy, such adaptability helps gain and maintain support from member states and regions, which can adapt the policy according to localized agendas (van Well, 2012).

Hajer and Wagenaar (2003, p. 9) stress that politics takes place between organizations, involving institutional routines and expectations as individuals are driven by a 'logic of appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 1998, p. 949). Callon (1984, p. 39) further points towards the social dimension of the policy translation process, illustrating how action and implementation result from negotiations, displacements and adjustments. Within these translations, interests and objectives are adopted, changed, adjusted and integrated into action programmes, potentially becoming modified or even dissolved completely

(ibid.). Amidst the conceptual ‘fuzziness’, the challenge is to translate Territorial Cohesion into action, allowing for practicable planning policy across national boundaries.

Territorial cooperation in Central European borderlands

The European Commission has long advocated ‘cooperation for territorial development’ (CEC, 1995, p. 10) to support developing ‘disadvantaged’ European border regions (CEC, 1991, p. 13). In the 2014–2020 funding period ‘European Territorial Cooperation’ (ETC), better known as INTERREG, alongside other initiatives has become one of two major Cohesion Policy goals, alongside ‘Investment for growth and jobs’. Since 2007 INTERREG has become an official EU policy tool to support territorial cooperation not only between the EU-28 member states but also with neighbouring states through EU Cohesion Policy (EC, 2019).¹

At present INTERREG aims to overcome disadvantages resulting from administrative barriers between neighbouring regions (Dühr, Stead, & Zonneveld, 2007, p. 294), and to support cooperation across member states by funding projects that address shared challenges. ‘Cooperation’ is defined through three major strands: cross-border (INTERREG A), transnational (INTERREG B), or interregional (INTERREG C) and supported by the Pre-Accession (IPA) and the European Neighbourhood (ENI) Instruments.

Although the measurable impacts of cooperation on Cohesion are limited, cooperation is understood to have *qualitative* impact through, for example, knowledge exchange and cultural rapprochement (Mirwaldt et al., 2008). Indeed, horizontal and vertical cooperation quickly emerged as one of the central means of implementing the Territorial Cohesion agenda among member states (ibid.). Besides the philosophical aims of the European project, cooperation has been increasingly necessitated by growing functional interdependencies between regions, and to counteract socio-spatial ‘bordering’ and ‘othering’ processes (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation draws the dilemma of fuzzy concepts into particular significance, since cooperation projects necessarily fall into more than one legislative and regulatory context. Hence, participating regions must translate different national planning and legal systems and different regional development strategies into one shared programme. However, this challenge often results in diverse and context-specific interpretations within one and the same cooperation programme (Dühr et al., 2007).

Data and methodology

To examine the dynamics of fuzzy concepts within European cooperation projects, we trace the translation of Territorial Cohesion into a specific spatial setting: the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region. The region unites an EU15 member state (Austria joined the EU in 1995) with three of the EU8 states (joining in 2004). The region’s narrow geographical scale nevertheless has high linguistic diversity and different spatial planning backgrounds (centralized vs. federal). Moreover, regional history ranges from close cooperation during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918) to total separation at the Austrian border during the Soviet era. The region was reconnected in 1989 following the fall of the Iron Curtain, and made closer again following the 2004 EU enlargement, and the end of border controls after the 2007 Schengen

Agreement. Nevertheless, the borderlands are still categorized as inner peripheries (ESPON, 2017) and characterized both by their long separation, and the challenges of rurality and low population density (excepting the Slovak side of the Vienna – Bratislava corridor).

The region's turbulent past and present re-development leads us to look closer at cooperation as a means for cohesion. Currently, the border region is covered by three, partly overlapping INTERREG A cooperation programmes (Figure 1). These together present the case study area for our analysis.

In the research process we first undertook a comprehensive literature review before deriving the research question for this paper. We then focussed on the case study region with regard to the relevance for the research question and its accessibility.

Choosing a multiple-case design (Yin, 2014), based on the region's heterogeneous characteristics, we applied a mixed methods approach, combining document analysis with explorative expert interviews. To trace the evolution and understanding of Territorial Cohesion in regional practice, we conducted a qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2006) on (1) selected EU policy documents, (2) stakeholder feedback from the 2009 online consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and (3) our own stakeholder interviews (conducted in 2018). We methodologically apply a data triangulation for the synthesis of the results (Boyatzis, 1998).

Although multifarious past and present European policy and legal documents, papers and reports deal with the spatial dimension of cohesion, we selected key documents



Figure 1. Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region and the three INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes in the case-study region.

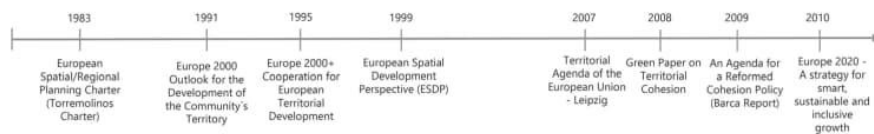


Figure 2. Analysed policy documents.

(Figure 2) based on their impact on the conceptualization of the current Territorial Cohesion policy for the funding period 2014–2020, their profile in regional practice and their appearance in scientific literature.

In order to trace practical understandings of Territorial Cohesion, we examine statements given in the 2009 online consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (CEC, 2008) – a notable attempt by the Commission to show how national and regional stakeholders view the concept – and thus follow Markusen (1999) in asking ‘how do we know it when we see it?’ Analysing these responses, which are archived on the Commission’s Inforegio website (Inforegio, 2011), we took only those statements ($n = 11$) relevant for our case-region (Figure 3) (cf. Abrahams, 2014). Examining statements from national ministries, regional authorities and NGOs in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, provided insights into the evolving ‘official’ understanding of Territorial Cohesion, which we used to develop the questionnaire for our expert interviews.

To analyse current understandings of Territorial Cohesion, we conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews, predominantly in the appropriate local language, with stakeholders ($n = 25$) in the case-region between spring and autumn 2018. The targeted stakeholders were officials from national, federal and regional authorities involved in all three INTERREG V-A programmes, plus representatives from ministries and regional planning agencies. They were selected based on their direct involvement in the INTERREG programmes, expert knowledge of cross-border cooperation in the case region, and through stakeholder recommendations.

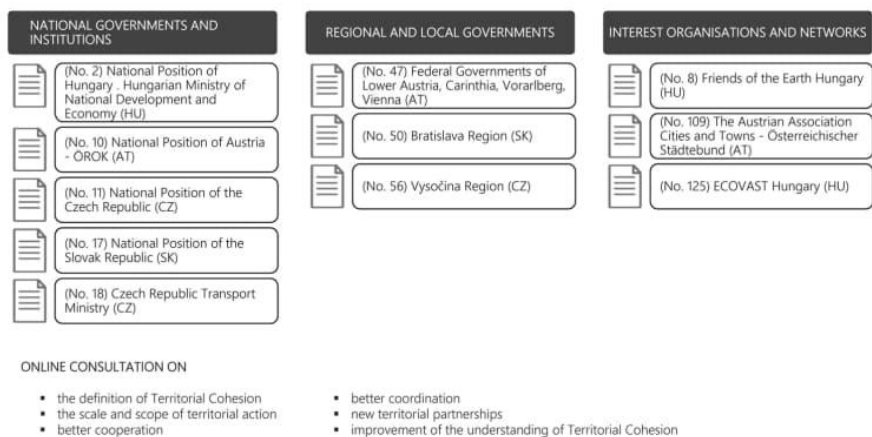


Figure 3. Online consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion – responses given by National Ministries, Regional Authorities and NGOs from Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (document numbers as originally listed on the Inforegio homepage – conducted 2009 and archived since 2011).

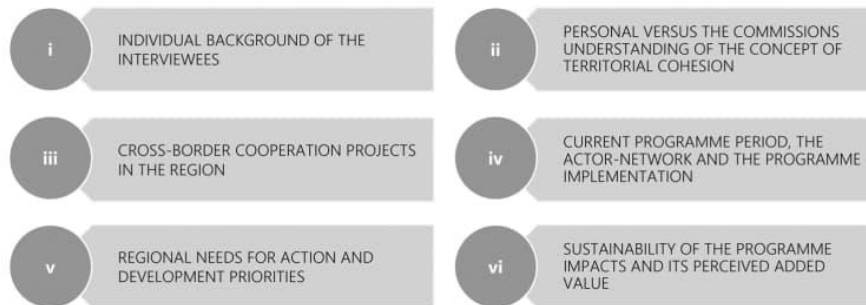


Figure 4. Stakeholder interviews with national ministries, managing authorities, regional coordinators and joint secretary staff, representatives from regional planning agencies and local experts in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (2018) dealing with the below listed topics.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty open questions, structured in six key categories (Figure 4). The analysis in this article focusses primarily on sections (ii), (v) and (vi).

Results

The results are structured in two sub-sections. The first addresses definitions of Territorial Cohesion in policy papers and European documents. The second investigates stakeholders' understandings of the concept in the case-region.

Representations of Territorial Cohesion in policy documents

One of the earliest calls for both balanced development of European regions and cooperation was the Council of Europe's *Torremolinos Charter* (CoE, 1983). The charter highlighted principles of long-term governance, focusing on spatial coordination, to avoid spatial topics being subsumed by short-term economic aims. Stretching objectives widely, the charter raised multiple cross-sectoral topics relevant to Territorial Cohesion. Later strategies, including the *Europe 2000* outlook (CEC, 1991), the *Europe 2000+* opinion (CEC, 1995) and the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) continued to posit multi-scalar action for the spatial dimension of cohesion. The *Europe 2000* outlook put an early focus on development for frontier areas (CEC, 1991), while the following *Europe 2000+* opinion brought improved cooperation to the fore (CEC, 1995, p. 9).

The ESDP (CEC, 1999) represented the first step towards turning the emerging, yet vague, principles of Territorial Cohesion into a policy framework (CEC, 1995, p. 9). Like previous documents, the ESDP highlighted cooperation at various levels, adding 'horizontal' and 'vertical' dimensions of cooperation (CEC, 1999, p. 35f.). Calling for a 'more balanced' competitiveness of European territories (CEC, 1999, p. 10) the ESDP further identified the need to protect structurally weaker regions across national borders, concluding that development alone would lead towards growing disparities (CEC, 1999, p. 11). By linking measures only to member state level, the documents emphasized 'subsidiarity', yet often stressed their non-binding character (see e.g. the preface of

the *ESDP*). Although references to present and future spatial challenges offered an important strategic perspective on territorial development, these documents nevertheless remained a ‘fuzzy’ framework, lacking clearly articulated responsibilities and regional measures to tackle the challenges they portrayed.

The 2007 German European Council presidency added further to the emergence of Territorial Cohesion through the *Territorial Agenda* agreed in Leipzig (BUMB, 2007). The agenda complemented the Lisbon treaty and Gothenburg strategy, highlighting ‘polycentric territorial development’ and ‘territorial solidarity’. By identifying the need to better respond to territorial needs and opportunities, the agenda initiated a Europe-wide stakeholder dialogue. The Commission thereafter released the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion – Turning diversity into strength* (CEC, 2008), adding an explicit territorial perspective to economic and social cohesion. Setting objectives for concentration, the connection of territories, territorial cooperation and the particular challenges of regions with specific features, the paper renewed the focus on rural and less developed regions. In the annex, a range of development challenges provided questions for an online stakeholder consultation (CEC, 2008, p. 11ff.).

While early policy documents called for bottom-up approaches and involvement from the wider public to increase Territorial Cohesion’s accessibility and impact, the search for indicators to demonstrate impact also increased over time. Growing demand for data comparability additionally led to initiatives such as the Urban Audit and European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), alongside a network of spatial research institutes across Europe (Dühr et al., 2007, p. 293). Yet despite the search for greater quantitative transparency, the use of fuzzy process wording (Markusen, 1999) like ‘decentralization,’ ‘urbanisation,’ ‘peripheralization,’ ‘modernisation,’ ‘institutionalisation’ and ‘polarisation’ equally increased across these policy documents.

Reflecting the need for greater transparency and comparability, the *Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy*, known as the *Barca Report* (Barca, 2009), dedicated a chapter to getting ‘inside the black box of cohesion policy’ and noted Cohesion’s successes and failures, calling in turn for more strategic, effective governance. In addition, the report introduced to the existing indicator-driven framework core priorities for: territorial allocation, a strategic framework, stronger contractual relationships and result-oriented implementation, financial management, impact evaluation, and reporting requirements. Introduced the following year, the ten-year *Europe 2020 Strategy* (CEC, 2010), acknowledged the need for collective action to realize the EU as a ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion’ (2010, p. 3). Nevertheless, to ensure the strategy’s adoption by Member States, the Commission proposed that EU targets be ‘translated into national targets and trajectories to reflect the current situation of each Member State and the level of ambition it is able to reach’ (CEC, 2010, p. 9) – thereby continuously leaving space open for multi-scalar interpretations of cohesion measures.

Territorial Cohesion in regional practice

Following our elucidation of Territorial Cohesion’s evolution and enduring fuzziness, we now investigate how actors in the case-region translate the concept into their respective regional contexts.

National, regional and local conceptualisations following the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

Overall, respondents to the 2009 online consultation on the Green Paper perceived Territorial Cohesion as a place-based, processual approach, supporting balanced economic, social and sustainable development. Against a background of regional diversity and principles of territorial subsidiarity, Territorial Cohesion was seen to foster polycentricity and rural-urban balance, build partnerships and maintain interconnection, enable cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation at national, regional and local levels and help to ensure a good quality of life. These expectations strongly reflect official communications and policy papers (as above). However, respondents took somewhat different positions on a more detailed understanding of the policy's aim and scope.

Figure 5 shows how understandings of Territorial Cohesion revolve around member states' different territorial needs. *Austrian* respondents have a highly 'potential driven' approach, viewing Territorial Cohesion as a tool to utilize territories' opportunities and strengths, while reducing 'weaknesses and bottlenecks for development' (National Position of Austria, 2009, p. 4). Respondents name no specific measures, referring instead to regional diversity and the need to address 'relevant' issues to assure development across administrative boundaries, while simultaneously respecting regions' functional, structural and geographical features. Further, respondents note that territorial cohesion should not be 'reduced to the quest for and development of indicators' (National Position of Austria, 2009, p. 9) but must include better regional statistics and shared data in order to shed more light on the particularities of regions than current GDP-based indicators allow (*ibid.*). To derive adequate regional indicators, Austrian respondents call for 'clarification of the term Territorial Cohesion' (Federal Governments of Lower Austria, Carinthia, Vorarlberg, Vienna, 2009, p. 11). Respondents further call for stronger acknowledgement of functional regions in contrast to (still) 'prevailing fixed administrative demarcations' (National Position of Austria, 2009, p. 4). Referring to the policy's participatory character, Austria's national position advocates a credible and uncomplicated participation process (National Position of Austria, 2009, p. 9) together with early informative measures and

AUSTRIAN STAKEHOLDERS	CZECH STAKEHOLDERS	SLOVAKIAN STAKEHOLDERS	HUNGARIAN STAKEHOLDERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a process, • fosters a sustainable use of the regional strengths and reduces the weaknesses and bottlenecks for development, • crosses administrative boundaries, • respects functional, structural and geographical features, • considers natural resources and ensures the optimal development conditions, • is a participative policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a means for solidarity and regional balance, • helps to coordinate activities and sources, supports transport and telecommunications infrastructure, • availability of public services, • development of human capital, • develop the country's peripheries, • ensure competitiveness, • builds connection to agricultural policy, • allows local actors to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is <i>not</i> a tool for standardization, • respects territorial specifics and considers the endogenous potential of the territory, • promote cross-border infrastructure, • improve transport accessibility, • raise the value of natural landscapes, • support tourism and provide public services, • equivalent living conditions for people and 'entrepreneurs', • preserve existing settlement patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is a means for solidarity and conflict-free and sustainable development, • have a coordinative function, • efficient use of resources, • supports underdeveloped regions, • is a 'catch-up' policy, • addresses problems like material deprivation, population decline and unemployment, • understood in accordance to the 'National Concept for Rural Development'

Figure 5. Online consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, county specific perceptions of Territorial Cohesion.

more dialogue to support a greater acceptance of the policy at local level (The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, 2009, p. 5). Nevertheless, Austrian responses repeatedly refer to the principle of subsidiarity, with one even stressing that there should be ‘no involvement into local, regional or national competences in the field of spatial planning’ at all (The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, 2009, p. 5).

In contrast, throughout the responses given by stakeholders from the *Czech Republic*, Territorial Cohesion is linked to more tangible areas, including transport and telecommunications infrastructure, public services, human capital, economic competitiveness and innovation. The concept is also seen as a means to mobilize natural and cultural potential, offering added value as an integrated approach for urban and rural development, and to coordinate activities addressing the ‘most serious identifiable problems’ (National Position of the Czech Republic, 2009, p. 1). Further, reflecting national development needs, Territorial Cohesion is seen as a means to develop inner peripheries, mobilize public and private sources, remove administrative boundaries, and link to agricultural policy (ibid., p. 2). Additionally, the concept ‘allows the local players to participate’ (National Position of the Czech Republic, 2009, p. 2), and Czech respondents consider that better inclusion of regional stakeholders into territorial policy drafting processes would ensure ‘wider acceptance’ at regional level (Vysočina Region, 2009, p. 2). Echoing the Austrian position, Czech respondents stress the need for harmonized indicators and question data comparability. Finally, territorial cohesion is perceived as a means to foster ‘solidarity’ and regional balance (ibid., p. 1).

Slovakian stakeholders, in contrast to other respondents, insist that Territorial Cohesion should not be a tool for standardization but enable strategies ‘tailor-made to each territory’, respecting territorial specificities and ‘considering the endogenous potential of the territory the main factor of its development’ (National Position of the Slovak Republic, 2009, p. 1). Territorial Cohesion is seen as a means to promote cross-border infrastructure and improve transport accessibility, raise the value of natural landscapes, support tourism, provide public services, preserve existing settlement patterns, and establish ‘equivalent conditions for the lives of people and for entrepreneurs’ (ibid., p.1). Referencing practical experience from cross-border programmes, respondents note that differences in legal systems cause difficulties for cooperation and call for more specific EC-level legislation (ibid., p. 2f.). Respondents highlight how participation can be raised through stronger awareness of Cohesion’s territorial dimension and argue for ‘clear and stable cooperation rules’, promoting transparency, information, accessibility, efficient communication and cross-sectoral cooperation (ibid., p. 4). They further propose that indicators should be ‘comprehensive, transparent, unambiguous, measurable, easy to monitor and evaluate, objective, comparable, easy to establish and readily available’, while more attentive to regional data (ibid., p. 4).

Finally, *Hungarian* respondents do see Territorial Cohesion’s role in solidarity and ‘conflict-free development’, but also highlight the policy’s coordinating function and contributions to efficient resource use and regional competitiveness. Stressing the importance of supporting underdeveloped regions, respondents note regional challenges including material deprivation, de-population, and unemployment. They view Territorial Cohesion as a ‘more comprehensive approach to spatial planning, including the assessment and evaluation of the territorial potential of settlements and regions, and their reciprocal effects’ (National Position of Hungary, 2009, p. 4). Nevertheless, Hungary’s national

position raises concerns that Territorial Cohesion may become a lobbying matter exclusively for certain states and regions (ibid., p. 3). Emphasising the local, bottom-up level for territorial implementation, Hungarian respondents stress that involving local actors in implementation and decision-making, alongside ‘active communication and broad participation’ (Friends of the Earth Hungary, 2009, p. 3), improves the efficiency of the process (National Position of Hungary, 2009, p. 11). Referring to the necessity for standardization, establishing a mutual framework for cross-border cooperation (ECOVAST, 2009, p. 2) and introducing common elements into spatial planning methods, Hungarian respondents call for a ‘uniform action plan’ and multilingual dictionaries (ibid., p. 5) to assist with translating key policy terms (Friends of the Earth Hungary, 2009, p. 1). Respondents observe that Territorial Cohesion is unknown among the wider public, which they identify as a potential problem for cooperation and overall ‘solidarity’ (ECOVAST, 2009, p. 2). Unlike other national responses, Hungarian government authorities reference a specific national policy – the ‘National Concept for Rural Development’ – as a guideline for interpretation, further including Territorial Cohesion in the National Strategic Reference Framework (National Position of Hungary, 2009, p. 1).

Current stakeholder perceptions of Territorial Cohesion and its added value to regional development

A decade after the Commission’s public consultation on Territorial Cohesion, many contested issues seem to remain unchanged for INTERREG programme representatives and national experts. Asked about general understandings of Territorial Cohesion, all but one interviewed stakeholder stated awareness that there are *different interpretations* of the concept. All referred to a ‘top-down’ versus ‘bottom-up’ interpretative logic, alternating among the EC, member states, regions, planners and local actors. The EC was seen to apply a top-down, number – and indicator-driven logic, whilst the regions take a more differentiated, detailed perspective (Int_16, 2018: 2).

The EC’s turn towards result orientation especially puts member states and programme authorities under pressure to measure cooperation programmes’ ‘effectiveness’, which stakeholders often described as a major challenge for Cohesion and cooperation in regional practice. Echoing statements from the online consultation, regional actors critically questioned data comparability. Member states are pressured to fit given categories of intervention and measurement logics, which actors noted are often not suited to regional diversity or adequately measurable in complex cross-border settings (Int_19, 2018: 3; Int_20, 2018: 1; Int_23, 2018: 20; Int_15, 2018: 26; Int_23, 2018: 20). Programme Managing Authorities are required to report ‘hard data’ to the Commission while simultaneously dealing with ‘soft projects’ aimed at fostering cross-border cultural rapprochement and hence hardly reducible to figures (Int_19_1, 2018: 3). Stakeholders also observed the varying expectations for and demands of Territorial Cohesion in differing cross-border contexts. Noting how the term is left deliberately open for interpretation, stakeholders criticized the high expectations nevertheless included. As one observed,

the European Commission always believes that through the INTERREG programmes and also with the projects we can eliminate border obstacles [so] that we can solve border-related problems. That is not the case. In some minor cases ... we can set an impulse, but only an impulse, never offer a solution ... (Int_18_1, 2018: 2)

Asking ‘What is really solvable with these programmes?’ the stakeholder added that the Commission’s answer differs; meanwhile, low financial resources compared to ‘mainstream national programmes’ make tackling large-scale regional challenges unlikely (ibid., p. 3). Consequently, some stakeholders perceive the EC’s requirements and recommendations more as ‘wishful thinking’ than practically achievable through programmes like INTERREG (Int_18, 2018: 3; Int_19, 2018: 3). For example,

[you] need to prove everything – and where there is no proof, that does not happen. ... I do not think that an INTERREG programme will change the state of the economy so much in a region like Lower Austria, Vienna or Burgenland that I could measure it. [In] my opinion, ... often the claims are not suitable, so the indicators one wants to have, they just do not fit. Because often I do not even have the instruments to measure them. (Int_15, 2018: 26)

Many stakeholders also stated that cross-border cooperation programmes have increasingly become an expert topic. Throughout the interviews it became apparent that many of the central actors in all three analysed INTERREG programmes have remained the same over the last decade, and sometimes were currently or formerly active in more than one programme. While this builds a dense, interconnected network of key actors in regional programme design and implementation, the growing complexity of cooperation programmes simultaneously displaces new local actors. Consequently, the same actors often repeatedly apply for funding, since only they have the necessary capacities, knowledge and networks to realize projects (Int_8, 2018: 15; Int_12_2, 2018: 3; Int_17, 2018: 16; Int_25, 2018: 5). One actor summarized this dynamic by noting: ‘[t]he same actors are coming repeatedly [to submit projects]. They are experienced and can better incorporate the new expectations into their experience, and that is one reason why the newcomers have fewer chances’ (Int_13, 2018: 10).

Referring to cooperation itself, all stakeholders viewed different stages of socio-economic development within the programme region as a challenge necessitating many compromises for setting overall development goals and establishing agreement on project selection. A stakeholder involved in multiple INTERREG programmes stated that ‘the history and experiences of the programmes’ also leads to differing programme development stages, especially between old and new programmes (Int_13, 2018: 4). Therefore,

from a programme’s point of view ... the more one comes west, the programmes become more formalized. Economic development projects or the direct involvement of small and medium enterprises ... [is observable] in western programmes [whereas] in eastern programmes they are dealing more often with installation of cross-border institutional, or sometimes even physical infrastructure. (Int_13, 2018: 4f.)

Asked their *own understanding of territorial cohesion*, some highlighted multiple dimensions of interpretation (Int_19, 2018: 2; Int_14, 2018: 1). One such dimension concerns socio-economic factors, like reducing regional disparities and improving competitiveness. Another dimension, prevailing across the interviews, is more relationship oriented. All interviewees highlighted softer aspects, such as: growing together, trust building, encountering different perspectives, exchanging know-how and overcoming former borders through rapprochement. One described Territorial Cohesion as the ability to ‘work together, to understand each other better ...’ (Int_13, 2018: 4). For almost all stakeholders, the mental diminishing of state borders, new possibilities for free movement, and cross-border relation-(re)building were highly relevant. One stakeholder argued that

in the Czech Republic, which was part of the Eastern Bloc, here we have experienced the green border, so the main sense is that the previously interconnected regions that have been separated, reconnect again. During the socialist era, the border areas became uninhabited, the infrastructure perished, the villages perished, all the historic continuity was interrupted. In my opinion ... we should return to its former interconnectedness and connect the territory, rebuild relationships so that the border diminishes again. (Int_20, 2018: 1)

Another stakeholder summarized Territorial Cohesion as 'getting closer to the neighbours in frame of cooperation ...', while yet another interviewee highlighted that 'the biggest challenge is to make the people, the inhabitants change their mind towards ... cross-border matters' (Int_22, 2019: 3). Regarding cooperation in general, almost all stakeholders also understood Territorial Cohesion as a means to reduce administrative barriers between states.

Further, when asked to describe the *added value* of Territorial Cohesion policies, stakeholders emphasized improvements to everyday life in border regions, especially for: disaster control, rescue services, water and waste management, educational cooperation, infrastructure and problem-solving, as well as interconnection between otherwise separated regions. Although they mentioned Territorial Cohesion's economic components (generally more evident in the Green Paper responses), relational factors prevailed. Thus, stakeholders emphasized interpersonal relationships, linkages, awareness of the 'neighbour', and changes from previously one-dimensional regional patterns. As one programme representative concluded: 'we can express added value in some currency, in number[s] of infrastructure, buildings, renovations etc. but if we can't change the mind of the inhabitants, then [what is it worth]?' (Int_22, 2018: 16).

Considering that cross-border cooperation measures have been taken in the region since the 2004 EU enlargement (and before, through pre-accession programmes), stakeholders were asked whether they would be willing to cooperate *without* European co-funding. All considered that, without the incentive of European co-funding, regional actors would likely not cooperate at all, or with reduced intensity. The only exception mentioned was cooperation between research institutions. Hence, Territorial Cohesion also adds value by effectively 'forcing' national and regional actors to cooperate in a cross-border context (Int_11_2, 2018: 6; Int_16, 2018: 13).

Discussion

Through the Green Paper responses and stakeholder interviews, understandings of Territorial Cohesion appear structured along *three key dimensions: relational, economic, and social* (Figure 6). These three dimensions describe how Territorial Cohesion is understood and 'configured' in relation to a given space, hence varying in different territorial contexts. In the case-study region, the relational dimension of Territorial Cohesion is clearly to the fore, although actors also refer to social and economic dimensions as intrinsic to the development of border areas. In the Austrian-Czech-Hungarian-Slovak border region, where territories were long separated in relational, economic, social and administrative terms, the 'added value' of Territorial Cohesion is conceptualized strongly along the relational dimension, as a precondition for the economic and social dimensions.

Yet, examining stakeholders' statements also demonstrates that the understandings of Territorial Cohesion differ. An Inforegio report on a 2008 conference held in Paris was pointedly titled *Territorial Cohesion – we think we want it, but we're not sure what it*

RELATIONAL DIMENSION	ECONOMIC DIMENSION	SOCIAL DIMENSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diminishing mental boundaries, trust building, interconnectedness, shared values, cooperation <p>(e.g. institutional cooperation, activities covering topics like cultural heritage and tourism)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> regional competitiveness, harmonization, human capital, reduction of disparities <p>(e.g. regional innovation, support of small and medium enterprises, boosting of regional competitiveness)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> equal living conditions, solidarity, equal participation, access to social services <p>(e.g. public and social services like medical treatment, water supply, waste management, education or labor market entry)</p>

Figure 6. Stakeholders understanding of Territorial Cohesion.

is' (Inforegio, 2008, p. 13); considerable disconnects in both the understanding and implementation of the concept still persist at multiple levels. Stakeholders simultaneously wish for greater conceptual clarification from the EC, while continuing to translate Territorial Cohesion in accordance with their own regional and national agendas. The more contested the concept becomes, it seems, the more fuzziness continues to be replicated. Territorial Cohesion, as observed throughout our analysis, matches Markusen's (1999, p. 870) definition of a 'fuzzy concept' as 'a concept with more than one alternative meaning'. Although fuzzy concepts gain purchase through their capacity to embrace a multitude of possible meanings, they cannot be coherently applied or reliably identified in retrospect (Cornwall, 2007, p. 472). Fuzziness allows for flexible adaption to existing or emerging policy frameworks (Faludi, 2001), but fuzzy concepts are difficult to operationalize and demonstrate, and thus cannot be expected to guide either substantive action (Markusen, 1999, p. 873) or measurable, comparable development.

While fuzzy conceptualization secures Territorial Cohesion's broader acceptance, fuzziness results in process-oriented approaches to territorial development and, as observed in the analysed documents, an increase in process language. Through language referring to *regional* processes rather than *individual* actions and responsibilities, the many actors involved become 'displaced' (Callon, 1984). Simultaneously, the need to maintain Territorial Cohesion's regional acceptance has led to calls for more bottom-up participatory approaches. However, with fuzziness suppressing agency and causality no responsibility for change is taken and established dynamics continue to prevail. The need to justify Territorial Cohesion's 'added value' for regional development has observably intensified the search for measurable indicators. However, statements from the 2009 consultation and the more recent interviews we presented above open the comparability of reported data to question. Stakeholders themselves continue to call for comprehensive approaches to regional policy, including harmonized indicators, actual regional data, standardization and overall conceptual clarification. Yet, it remains questionable whether, in a regional context where the relational aspects of 'added value' are to the fore, quantitative indicators can adequately reflect Territorial Cohesion's 'softer' practical effects. Meanwhile, multiple expert translations of Territorial Cohesion into respective regional contexts and back to

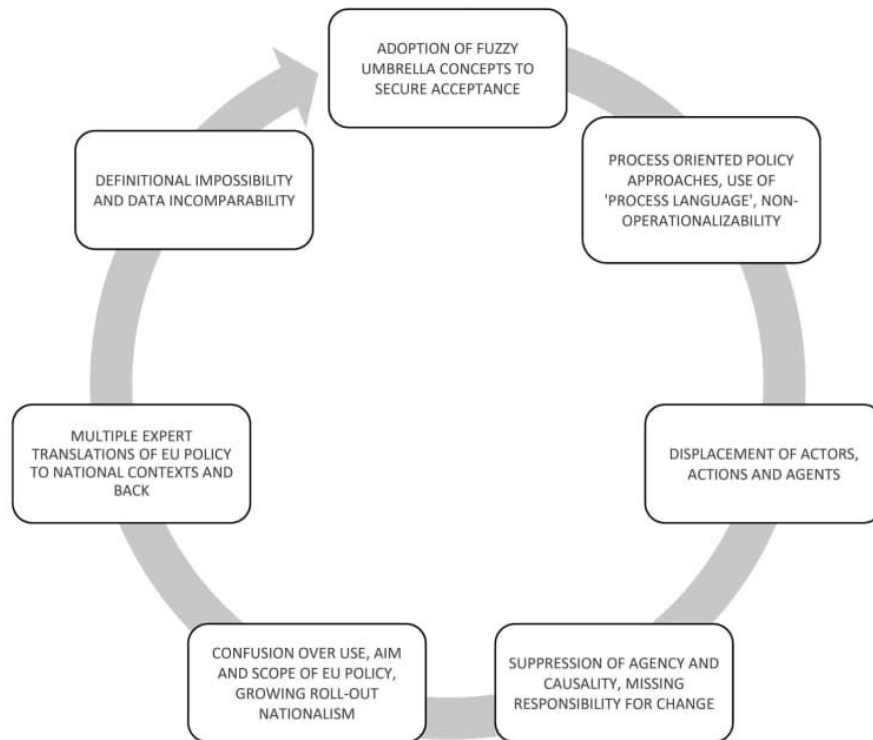


Figure 7. Territorial Cohesion and the circular process of policy fuzziness.

the EC become commonplace, fuelling the definitional impossibility and producing incomparable outcomes, especially among regions at heterogeneous territorial development stages, which translate the concept according to their respective needs.

We observe, therefore, a circular process through which the fuzziness of Territorial Cohesion policies becomes reproduced (Figure 7). Cyclical dynamics lead from the formulation of process-oriented approaches, to the displacement of actors, actions and agents, as well as the suppression of agency and causality. As confusion and scepticism over Territorial Cohesion's aims and scope manifests amongst the actors, multiple expert translations into national policy contexts are generated, and fed back to EU level, thus creating a persistent definitional impossibility and even more fuzziness. This cyclical process of policy 'fuzziness', with differing regional translations and incomparable outcomes, requires the continued use of fuzzy umbrella concepts by the EC, securing Territorial Cohesion's national acceptance while in turn necessitating further iterative translations.

Conclusion

In our case study region – the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian borderlands in Central Europe – stakeholders understand Territorial Cohesion along three dimensions: relational, economic and social. Further, they identify the concept's added value mostly as decreasing bordering and 'othering' processes, encouraging cross-border cooperation, and improving

everyday quality of life (especially in the so-called ‘lagging’ regions). Nevertheless, Territorial Cohesion’s ‘fuzzy’ conceptualization means that few comprehensive, comparable outcomes can be delivered. Barely comparable regional data, which fails to capture regional developments at the finer scale where policy measures unfold their dynamics, makes any of Territorial Cohesion’s potential effects difficult to reliably observe in practice or retrospect. Conceptual fuzziness thus, almost inevitably, results in a cyclical process where fuzziness leads to definitional impossibility, displaces actors and the responsibility for change, while fuelling local confusion over Territorial Cohesion’s aims and scope – building the ground for the diminishing acceptance of EU measures.

Given these cyclical dynamics and their complexity, formulating policy recommendations to more effectively mobilize Territorial Cohesion across diverse regional contexts poses a considerable challenge. Indeed, an intervention at a single point on the circle we have described may serve to perpetuate more than it solves. We conclude hence with questions and considerations for Territorial Cohesion at differing scales.

Data comparability is evidently an enduring issue. At EU level, measurement and data collection strategies are clearly due an overhaul. However, can gathering data sets really help generate comparative outcomes? Quantitative indicator-based logics have only limited ability to reflect the socio-historical processes that economically shape European territories. More so, keeping Territorial Cohesion fuzzy while seeking comparably measurable outcomes are near contradictory impulses. However, one remaining open question is whether breaking the impasse lies in providing a clearer definition or in the gathering of more region-specific data, or both?

This tension between context and comparison is particularly echoed at a regional level. As differing territorial dynamics among diverse regions inevitably influence how Territorial Cohesion becomes translated. Recent calls for more context-specific approaches (Bachtrögl, Fratesi, & Perucca, 2019; Fratesi & Wislode, 2017; Gagliardi & Percoco, 2017) highlight the need to better understand the effects of these dynamics on policy implementation. Whether the Commission’s current target indicators are appropriate for addressing regional diversity and differing development paths remains open to challenge (Jones, Goodwin-Hawkins, & Woods, *In press*). Yet, as our study demonstrates, relying on fuzzy conceptualization’s generative potential to enable regionally tailored responses to Territorial Cohesion falls down when development projects cross borders, bringing different contexts and translations into juxtaposition. While EU policy encourages territorial cooperation for development, current structures and governance arrangements may not – especially with funding remaining the main incentive to work together – serve this objective. What needs to be rethought, therefore, is how Territorial Cohesion could be conceptualized to effectively function across and between territories.

These are more than semantic questions. With EU policy increasingly an expert topic, excluding the public on whose behalf it speaks (Callon, 1984), confusion about the local significance of EU measures is, unsurprisingly, growing. Communicating Territorial Cohesion at a public level has proven significantly challenging. Misinformation and sometimes even misinterpretation, amidst the often insufficient public communication of EU funding, may be contributing to roll-out nationalist tendencies, re-bordering and ‘othering’ processes (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Schoene, 2019; van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). We conclude therefore that the answer is neither simply to increase communication efforts nor funding levels in an attempt to win over residents, but to produce tangible change in

people's everyday lives (Crescenzi, Di Cataldo, & Giua, 2019, p. 4). Here the tension between top-down and bottom-up approaches again becomes apparent. Thus, we raise the question: can depending on a fuzzy concept to produce local-level change ever produce outcomes that can be retrospectively labelled as 'what the EU does for you'?

Rather than keeping scientific discussions at the scale of document analysis and GDP-driven quantification, our case study demonstrates why we must move the focus more clearly towards Territorial Cohesion's context-specific dynamics, while simultaneously reflecting on wider, recurring processes at a European scale. Through addressing the varying planning cultures and practices of policymaking together with how Cohesion Policy is translated and adapted differently in different regional contexts, we can start to discuss actual policy measures to tackle future European development challenges. Only in doing so can we counteract the difficulties in communicating Cohesion Policy to the non-expert audiences who are, after all, the policy's intended beneficiaries.

Note

1. For further information regarding the evolution of INTERREG initiatives see https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cs/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/

Acknowledgments

We thank the research participants for their time, their insights and their overall confidence to support this research. Furthermore, we want to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments.

Demeterova and Goodwin-Hawkins wish to acknowledge the RSA, AESOP, ERSA and the European Committee of the Regions for funding and facilitating their participation in the 2018 European Week of Regions and Cities, where an early version of this article was presented. This article should not be taken to represent the opinion of any of the bodies acknowledged above.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Horizon 2020 Framework Programme [grant number 726950]; Department of Social Affairs of the Federal State of Lower Austria.

Availability of data

The interview data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author (tatjana.fischer@boku.ac.at). The data are not publicly available due to GDPR restrictions.

ORCID

Barbara Demeterova  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7087-2117>

Bryonny Goodwin-Hawkins  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9399-5486>

Tatjana Fischer  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5293-7941>

References

- Abrahams, G. (2014). What 'Is' Territorial Cohesion? What does it 'Do'? Essentialist versus pragmatic approaches to using concepts. *European Planning Studies*, 22(10), 2134–2155. doi:10.1080/09654313.2013.819838
- The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns. (2009). *Stellungnahme – Grünbuch zum territorialen Zusammenhalt – Vielfalt als Stärke*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Bachtrögler, J., Fratesi, U., & Perucca, G. (2019). The influence of the local context on the implementation and impact of EU Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies*, 29, 1–14.
- Barca, F. (2009). *AN agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations – Barca Report*.
- Begg, I. (2010). Cohesion or confusion: A policy searching for objectives. *Journal of European Integration*, 32(1), 77–96. doi:10.1080/07036330903375115
- Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development/ Richard E. Boyatzis*. Thousand Oaks, CA, London: Sage Publications.
- BUMB. (2007). *Territorial Agenda of the European Union: Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions, Agreed on the occasion of the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion in Leipzig on 24/25 May 2007*.
- Callon, M. (1984). Some elements of a sociology of translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. *The Sociological Review*, 32(1_suppl), 196–233. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.1984.tb00113.x
- CEC. (1991). *Europe 2000 Outlook for the development of the Community's territory: A preliminary overview*.
- CEC. (1992). *Treaty on European Union: Maastricht*.
- CEC. (1994). *European social policy: a way forward for the Union: A white paper*.
- CEC. (1995). *Europe 2000+. Cooperation for European territorial development*.
- CEC. (1997). *Treaty of Amsterdam: Amending the Treaty on European Union, the treaties establishing the European communities and certain related Acts*. Luxembourg, Lanham, MD: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities; Bernan Associates [distributor].
- CEC. (1999). *ESDP – European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*.
- CEC. (2008). *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning Territorial diversity into strength*.
- CEC. (2010). *EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*.
- CEC. (2017a). *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions*.
- CEC. (2017b). *Seventh Report on economic, social and Territorial Cohesion: My Region, My Europe, Our Future*.
- CoE. (1983). *European regional/spatial planning Charter: Torremolinos Charter*.
- Cornwall, A. (2007). Buzzwords and fuzzwords: Deconstructing development discourse. *Development in Practice*, 17(4–5), 471–484. doi:10.1080/09614520701469302
- Crescenzi, R., Di Cataldo, M., & Giua, M. (2019). It's not about the money! EU Funds, local opportunities, and the Brexit vote. *LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion paper series (LEQS)(149/2019)*.
- Dao, H., Plagnat Cantoreggi, P., & Rousseaux, V. (2017). Operationalizing a contested concept: Indicators of Territorial Cohesion. *European Planning Studies*, 25(4), 638–660. doi:10.1080/09654313.2017.1281230
- Dühr, S., Stead, D., & Zonneveld, W. (2007). The Europeanization of spatial planning through Territorial cooperation. *Planning Practice and Research*, 22(3), 291–307. doi:10.1080/02697450701688245
- EC. (2019). *Interreg European Territorial Co-operation*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/de/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/
- ECOVAST. (2009). *Vélemény és javaslatok a területi kohézióról készült Zöld Könyvhöz*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm

- ESPON. (2017). *PROFECY – Processes, Features and Cycles of Inner Peripheries in Europe: Inner Peripheries: National territories facing challenges of access to basic services of general interest*.
- Evers, D. (2012). A solution in search of a problem: A ‘garbage can’ approach to the politics of Territorial Cohesion. *European Journal of Spatial Development* February, 2012(45), 1–24.
- Faludi, A. (2001). The application of the European spatial development perspective: Evidence from the North-West metropolitan area. *European Planning Studies*, 9(5), 663–675. doi:10.1080/09654310120057368
- Faludi, A. (2006). From European spatial development to Territorial Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies*, 40(6), 667–678. doi:10.1080/00343400600868937
- Faludi, A. (2007). Territorial Cohesion policy and the European model of society1. *European Planning Studies*, 15(4), 567–583. doi:10.1080/09654310701232079
- Faludi, A. (2016). EU Territorial Cohesion, a contradiction in terms. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 17(2), 302–313. doi:10.1080/14649357.2016.1154657
- Federal Governments of Lower Austria, Carinthia, Vorarlberg, Vienna. (2009). *Grünbuch zum territorialen Zusammenhalt – Territoriale Vielfalt als Stärke Stellungnahme der österreichischen Länder Niederösterreich, Kärnten, Vorarlberg und Wien*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Fratesi, U., & Wishlade, F. (2017). The impact of European Cohesion Policy in different contexts. *Regional Studies*, 51(6), 817–821. doi:10.1080/00343404.2017.1326673
- Friends of the Earth Hungary. (2009). *Comments on the ‘Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion’*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Gagliardi, L., & Percoco, M. (2017). The impact of European Cohesion Policy in urban and rural regions. *Regional Studies*, 51(6), 857–868. doi:10.1080/00343404.2016.1179384
- Hajer, M., & Wagenaar, H. (2003). *Deliberative policy analysis: Understanding governance in the network society*. Cambridge, UK, New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.
- Inforegio. (2008). Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, the way ahead. *Inforegio panorama* December 2008(28).
- Inforegio. (2011). *Contributions to the consultation: Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion – Turning Territorial diversity into strength*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Jones, R., Goodwin-Hawkins, B., & Woods, M. (In press). From Territorial Cohesion to regional spatial justice: The well-being of future Generations Act in Wales. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*.
- Jones, R., Moisis, S., Weckroth, M., et al. (2019). Re-conceptualising Territorial Cohesion through the Prism of spatial justice: Critical perspectives on academic and policy discourses. In T. Lang, & F. Görmar (Eds.), *Regional and local development in times of polarisation Re-thinking spatial policies in Europe* (pp. 97–119). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mairate, A. (2006). The ‘added value’ of European Union Cohesion policy. *Regional Studies*, 40(2), 167–177. doi:10.1080/00343400600600496
- March, J., & Olsen, J. (1998). The institutional dynamics of international political Orders. *International Organization*, 52(4), 943–969. doi:10.1162/002081898550699
- Markusen, A. (1999). Fuzzy concepts, scanty evidence, policy distance: The case for Rigour and policy relevance in critical regional studies. *Regional Studies*, 33(9), 869–884. doi:10.1080/00343409950075506
- Medeiros, E. (2016). Territorial Cohesion: An EU concept. *European Journal of Spatial Development*, 60, 1–30.
- Medeiros, E. (2017). European Union Cohesion policy and Spain: A Territorial impact assessment. *Regional Studies*, 51(8), 1259–1269. doi:10.1080/00343404.2016.1187719
- Medeiros, E. (2014). Assessing Territorial impacts of the EU cohesion policy at the regional level: The case of Algarve. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32(3), 198–212. doi:10.1080/14615517.2014.915134
- Mirwaldt, K., McMaster, I., & Bachtler, J. (2008). Reconsidering Cohesion Policy: The Contested Debate on Territorial Cohesion. EoRPA Paper 08/5(5).

- National Position of Austria. (2009). *Austrian Position: Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion – Turning Diversity into Strangth*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- National Position of Hungary. (2009). *Hungarian contribution to the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- National Position of the Czech Republic. (2009). *Position of the Czech Republic to the Territorial Cohesion*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- National Position of the Slovak Republic. (2009). *Preliminary position of the Slovak Republic to the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2018). The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 11(1), 189–209. doi:10.1093/cjres/rsx024
- Schoene, M. (2019). European disintegration? Euroscepticism and Europe's rural/urban divide. *European Politics and Society*, 20(3), 348–364. doi:10.1080/23745118.2018.1542768
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction/ David Silverman*. London: SAGE.
- van Houtum, H., & van Naerssen, T. (2002). Bordering, ordering and othering. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 93(2), 125–136. doi:10.1111/1467-9663.00189
- van Well, L. (2012). Conceptualizing the logics of Territorial Cohesion. *European Planning Studies*, 20(9), 1549–1567. doi:10.1080/09654313.2012.708021
- Vysočina Region. (2009). *Otázky k diskusi v rámci zelené knihy o územní soudržnosti*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm
- Waterhout, B. (ed.). (2002). *Polycentric development: What is behind it?* Cambridge, Mass: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington, DC: SAGE.
- Zaucha, J., & Böhme, K. (2019). Measuring Territorial cohesion is not a mission impossible. *European Planning Studies*, 60(2), 1–23. doi:10.1080/09654313.2019.1607827
- Zonneveld, W., & Waterhout, B. (eds.). (2005). Visions on Territorial Cohesion. Special Issue on European Territorial Cohesion. *The Town Planning Review*, 76(1), 15–27.

5.2 The right to not catch up - Transitioning European territorial cohesion towards spatial justice for sustainability


Demeterova, Barbara; Fischer, Tatjana; Schmude, Jürgen (2020): The Right to Not Catch Up - Transitioning European Territorial Cohesion Towards Spatial Justice for Sustainability. In: Sustainability, 12 (11):4797.

The second article investigated the second research question. It was published in 2020 in the MDPI journal Sustainability in the course of the special issue on “Sustainable Territorial Development”.

Author contributions: Conceptualisation, B.D. and T.F.; methodology, B.D. and T.F.; software B.D.; validation, B.D.; formal analysis, B.D.; investigation, B.D.; resources, B.D. and T.F.; writing—original draft preparation, B.D.; writing—review and editing, B.D., T.F. and J.S.; visualization, B.D.; supervision, T.F. and J.S.; project administration, B.D.; funding acquisition, T.F. and B.D.

Article

The Right to Not Catch Up—Transitioning European Territorial Cohesion towards Spatial Justice for Sustainability

Barbara Demeterova ¹, Tatjana Fischer ^{2,*} and Jürgen Schmude ¹

¹ Department of Geography, Chair for Economic Geography and Tourism Research, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, 80333 Munich, Germany; b.demeterova@lmu.de (B.D.); j.schmude@lmu.de (J.S.)

² Institute of Spatial Planning, Environmental Planning and Land Rearrangement (IRUB), Department of Landscape, Spatial and Infrastructure Sciences, BOKU—University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, 1190 Vienna, Austria

* Correspondence: tatjana.fischer@boku.ac.at

Received: 11 May 2020; Accepted: 4 June 2020; Published: 11 June 2020



Abstract: Recent EU environmental and spatial policies notably strive towards the development paradigm of green growth and economic competitiveness. However, operationalizing spatial policies through growth-driven GDP logics promotes an unequal race towards narrowly defined developmental ‘success’, while perpetuating social, economic and environmental inequalities. Meanwhile, the EU’s territorial cohesion approach has remained a conceptual ‘black box’, its apparent inadequacy for notably mitigating territorial disparities leading to renewed questions about territorial policy’s relevance, delivery and evaluation. In this paper, we add to calls for redesigning territorial cohesion by proposing a turn towards spatial justice for territorial sustainability. Pointing out the need to refocus on regional capabilities and alternative development trajectories, we argue that the ‘right to not catch up’ enables a more locally meaningful and globally sustainable development. Drawing from regional statistics, policy analyses and an empirical case study of three European Territorial Cooperation programs in the heterogeneous Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region, we illustrate how current EU spatial policy approaches evolve in regional practice and why current policy aims fall short for sustainable transformations. Through interrogating development discourses and their alternatives, we contribute to emerging new perspectives on sustainable territorial development at the European as well as at regional levels.

Keywords: territorial sustainability; spatial justice; territorial cohesion; regional capabilities; European border regions; cross-border cooperation; regional disparities

1. Introduction

Reflecting the cross-sectoral character of sustainable development, the European Commission’s communication on European values in the globalized world recognizes that “[...] national and social policies are built on shared values such as solidarity and cohesion, equal opportunities and the fight against all forms of discrimination, adequate health and safety in the workplace, universal access to education and healthcare, quality of life and quality in work, sustainable development and the involvement of civil society” [1]. Stretching across social, economic and ecological aspects of development, the concept of sustainability steadily gained relevance for European territorial policies. Included in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and later in the Gothenburg Strategy (2006), the concept is part of European Union’s (EU) current strategic foundation, the EU 2020 strategy (2010) “for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” [2]. Nevertheless, sustainability-related development, as a multidimensional concept, seems to be increasingly replaced by ‘climate change’ as a popular

environmental policy term [2] Unlike sustainability, climate change mitigation and adaption processes come along with messages more easily communicated and understood, while also not being in conflict with current economic-growth-driven development measures [2] However, this perspective runs the risk of missing more holistic approaches to territorial development.

Taking territorial cohesion policies' dominant focus on the economies of scale, combined with urban-friendly policy and regulatory frameworks [3], the EU's spatial policies continue to ignore the fact that the so-called 'growth poles' do not spread evenly [4,5] and mostly lack the desired distributional effects towards their surroundings. Also, the European Commission's approach to climate-related issues through the promotion of green growth is tied to the somewhat misleading belief that economic prosperity and growth, based on a gross domestic product (GDP) rationale, can take place without overstepping ecological limits [6]. As climate concerns have finally captured public and policy attention, recent environmental policy approaches, such as the "European Green Deal" [7], cannot be seen without their interconnectedness with European cohesion measures and current spatial development processes. The European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) already pointed towards the link between environmental issues and territorial cohesion early on, indicating that climate change would negatively add to existing socio-economic imbalances since many economically lagging regions are also the most vulnerable [8]. Thus, political business as usual would inevitably lead to a stronger increase of the already existing spatial inequalities across Europe. However, the connection ESPON drew between environmental issues, sustainable development and territorial cohesion is still surprisingly seldom recalled, and even less frequently interrogated. With fiscally weaker, so-called 'lagging' regions causing significant concerns for Europe's future development, as well as its political stability [9], we point towards the need to adequately understand and address the continuance of unequal social, economic and environmental development dynamics across Europe. Due to the continued adherence to techno-centered approaches on the one hand, and the perpetuation of an economic-growth-driven logic on the other, neither the European Commission's environmental nor its cohesion policy is likely to truly tackle the entangled challenges ahead.

Therefore, we discuss the 'spatial justice approach' as a promising alternative to the current one-dimensional perspective on European territorial development. It insists on the regions' "right to difference" [10], advocating for the spatial dimension of justice to counteract spatial dynamics of injustice, while also taking into account regional needs and capabilities [11,12]. Bearing the potential to add to the policies' aim for sustainable development, we believe that future territorial approaches must allow for differing, regionally anchored definitions of success and finally start to address the social, economic and environmental dimensions of inequity accordingly.

The article proceeds as follows. Firstly, the literature review gives an overview of previous work addressing spatial justice, territorial cohesion and current approaches to sustainability in European policy. In the following section, we introduce our case region, methods and data used. We draw our results from regional data, policy documents and an empirical case study of three European Territorial Cooperation programs in the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region. Tracing the operationalization of territorial cohesion, we discuss why both inequalities and sustainability have been addressed insufficiently. By reflecting on the statements given by interviewed program stakeholders in our case region, we then illustrate existing tensions between measurement-based program logics and local development. Finally, after pointing out why current policies fail to induce sustainable transformations, we propose the 'right to not catch up' in our concluding discussion as an emerging new perspective on future sustainable territorial development at the European regional level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Spatial Justice as an Alternative Approach for Territorial Development*

Until the late 1980s, it was widely accepted that development represented by a growing GNP (gross national product) per capita was a desirable outcome, pointing towards a change from industrial

to service-based economies [13]. Throughout the 1990s, this perception steadily changed towards development beginning to be viewed more as a multidimensional process, aiming at the improvement of living standards and individual capabilities [14]. With growing complexity through globalization processes, it became more difficult to understand the dynamics driving change. Thus, the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) proposed the HDI (Human Development Index) to capture human development more realistically. Nonetheless, the HDI has remained a rather normative index to date, continuing to simplify the complex ideas of progress or development [15]. That is also the case for the EPI (Environmental Performance Index). Developed by academic institutions in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, it evaluates environmental sustainability by creating a synthetic index for environmental performance and aims to shape national environmental strategies [13]. When using synthetic indicators on a larger spatial scale, the main issue that remains is their robustness through time and location, with many variables not being available annually; therefore, they remain contested and seldom allow for concrete policy action [2]. Given the shortcomings in addressing well-being and environmental sustainability through synthetic indicators, a turn towards alternatives is highly probable.

In the wake of the 1970s and 1990s, with theorists including Davies [16], Lefebvre [17], Harvey [18] or Young [10] responding to anti-capitalist struggles in urban spaces by arguing for a necessary transition to a more just and heterogeneous society, the concept of 'spatial justice' gained academic attention. In the past decade, resurgent interest in how spatial processes create dynamics of injustice has followed especially Feinstein's *The Just City* [19] and Soja's *Seeking Spatial Justice* [20] as conceptual approaches. The authors argue for two key positions. Firstly, space is not a 'container' for socio-economic processes [21], therefore creating the need to interrogate both how space influences injustice and how it allows for imagining just alternatives [22]. Secondly, what is 'just' varies across space, hence individuals and groups should be enabled to define justice for themselves [23]. Furthermore, spatial justice articulates with the capabilities approach to development introduced by Sen [12,24] and Nussbaum [25,26]. Their understanding conceptualizes development through what people have the "capability to be and do". Yet, while "freedom and liberty; the ability to live our lives and be happy" [23] are shared goals, capabilities theorists caution against imagining a singular vision of what a perfectly just society should look like [24], as paths to development are multifold.

Academic scholars trying to conceptualize spatial justice for policy analysis [10,11] have therefore strongly advocated for the right to difference, adopting Balibar's principle of "égalité" [27]. This principle aims for an approach of freedom and equality, understood as universal principles which are not exclusive to any particular group, where the development and good life of one group do not come at the cost of restricting the freedom and development of others [11]. Also, as Pirie pointed out early on [28], the "justness of a situation may be decided by the person whom it directly affects", hence it is context dependent and in close association with individual preference and social choice theory. Thus, the conceptualization of space itself must be perceived as something socially constructed. He identifies both the "spatiality of injustice" as comprising physical and locational aspects, as well as more abstract spaces of social and economic relationships sustaining the production of injustice, and the "injustice of spatiality", understood as the elimination of possibilities for the formation of political responses [28]. Scholars investigating the spatial dimension of justice are addressing topics such as the (lacking) access to, for example, resources [29], infrastructure, transport, housing and health care [30], the job market and welfare state [31,32], or the exposure to environmental risks [33,34]. In line with dependency theorists like Wallerstein [35], others focus on core-periphery concentrations of "spatial unevenness" [11,36,37]. Addressing the (in)justice of power relations, such as dependency, domination or repression of social-spatial 'actors' [11,38], these perspectives reflect the multiscale dimensions of justice relating to the uneven impacts of policy measures [39–41].

Capabilities proponents, aiming to address the quality of life in the context of spatial justice, have consequently criticized the use of macroeconomic indicators like GDP to measure developmental 'success' as "real human importance", which is, Nussbaum [26] writes, "located not in GDP but

elsewhere". This echoes the growing interest in alternative measures of well-being [42] and, as we have outlined above, challenges orthodox views on continued economic growth.

To date, however, spatial justice has primarily been theorized at an urban scale, positioning the city as a driver for modern inequalities and the site for change [18]. However, as "justice and injustice are fused into the multi-scalar geographies in which we live" [20], recent calls for spatial justice to be 'regionalized' are urging attention to its implications for spatial planning [43]. Against the background of growing regional disparities [44,45], especially between Europe's central and peripheral regions, and current socio-political upheavals, the concept of spatial justice allows to explicitly address the uneven spatial impacts of European territorial policies. Thus, it bears the potential to adequately acknowledge and refer to the diversity of European regions (beyond national centers) and their capabilities, while also reflecting on the multiple paths to development from a post-growth perspective on sustainable development.

2.2. Trajectories of European Territorial Development Approaches Under a Growth Premise

European cohesion policy aims to support balanced economic, social and territorial development across all European regions, especially those 'lagging behind'. Nonetheless, cohesion policies shift towards turning into a tool for regional growth and global-local competitiveness becomes apparent. As Brenner [46,47] points out, ongoing globalization processes are bearing the danger of a deterritorialization of policies, by detaching and disembodiment social relations from places and territories on sub-global scales. Advocating for a re-scaling of governance and new representations of scaling in general, he points out the challenge for European spatial policies of rapidly changing territorial organizations under neoliberal and capitalist development objectives.

However, with the 'Europeanisation' of regional and urban policy [4,48–50] spatial policy appears to be increasingly detached from regional scales, following a uniform mantra of development which aims to boost the competitive capacities of regions through their cities [4]. Perceiving cities as drivers for economic growth, European key documents on territorial development like the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) [51], the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion [52], the Territorial Agenda 2020 [2] or the recent White Paper on the Future of Europe [53], however, remain rather vague on how to equally spread growth dynamics across regions [4]. These key documents, aiming at a polycentric development, follow the assumption that economic growth spreads evenly from global to regional urban centers, then further trickles down to medium-sized cities, to finally spill over to their peripheral hinterlands. However, as Rahut and Humer [4] demonstrate, there are trajectories in economic thought, especially when it comes to EU cohesion policies' balanced territorial impacts. Identifying the policies' rationale as following the Growth Pole Theory, proposed by Perroux [54] in the 1950s to stimulate French post-war economies, they highlight the negative side-effects of this rather outdated orientation that misses today's service-economy-driven dynamics [4]. Emphasizing that a motor industry induces a growth phenomenon on weaker industries through dense interactions, Perroux saw industrial linkages as the central element of the theory [5]. Nevertheless, Hirschman [55] acknowledged early on that inter-regional imbalances are inevitable when following economic-growth-driven approaches for territorial development [4,55]. Cohesion policies' ongoing dominant focus on the economies of scale through agglomeration, clustering and concentration, steadily led to urban-friendly policy and regulatory frameworks [3]. However, since growth poles and their supply chains do not spread evenly across territories [4,5], balanced development cannot be expected. Increasingly cut loose from their immediate locality [56], agglomeration economies lack the desired distributional effects to their surroundings, which fuels inter- and intra-regional imbalances between territories [3–5,50,57,58]. Salai-i-Martin [58] has shown that even though, over a long time period, a pattern of convergence emerged across European regions, the overall convergence speed was rather low and overshadowed regional divergence processes within European countries [3,44]. This trend seems to continue to the present, occurring especially at inner-national peripheries such as border regions [9,44,59–61]. Ignoring these effects seems to be partly a result of cohesion policies' complex settings for the formulation and

implementation of territorial goals. Its growing importance since the 1970s has made it become a shared policy based on the division of competences between the Member States and the European Community [50,62].

Following the overarching principles of subsidiarity, partnership, concentration, programming and additionally, its implementation requires multi-annual planning, specific financial instruments and budget allocation mechanisms [50]. Undergoing several reforms, the policy steadily changed from supporting wide-ranging ad-hoc projects to a more systematic approach that sets the target objectives which the national bodies then adopt in the process of programming and implementation [2]. With the European Commission's formal acknowledgement of cohesion policies' territorial dimension in the Lisbon Treaty (2007), alongside with economic and social cohesion, it is now placed under Europe 2020 strategy's "inclusive growth priority" [63]. Following a growth rather than a development narrative [64], measuring the policies' impacts according to socio-economic indicators and GDP data comparison at NUTS 2 level (national territorial units with a population size between 800,000 and 3 million), the European Commission never adopted mandatory guidelines to the policies' regional implementation [64]. Combined with the Member States' resistance to centralized regulations and spatial planning not falling into EU competences, territorial cohesion implementation remains highly contested to date [65,66]. Adding to the underlying disagreement between the European Commission and the Member States [65], Doucet [67] also addresses the policies' contradiction in aiming to provide a tool for urban-rural balance and simultaneously for regional competitiveness. Taking the policies' conceptual 'fuzziness', in addition to the mentioned shortcomings, the question of its general use for planning has been raised [68–70]. While some authors [62,71,72] point out the generative function of policy fuzziness helping to gain and maintain Member States' support, others criticize that this leads to multiple individual conceptualizations and incomparable outcomes [70,73]. This becomes especially apparent in heterogeneous regional contexts, where cooperation takes place across borders [70,74].

To support the development of 'disadvantaged' European border regions [75], from the late 1990s on, the European Commission started to support "cooperation for territorial development" [76]. In the 2014–2020 programming period, "European Territorial Cooperation" became one of two major cohesion policy goals, alongside "Investment for growth and jobs". European Territorial Cooperation (better known as INTERREG) thus represents a key instrument for enhancing territorial development to overcome disadvantages resulting from administrative barriers between neighboring regions [48] and for addressing shared challenges. Funding follows three strands of action: cross-border (INTERREG A), transnational (INTERREG B) and interregional (INTERREG C) cooperation. Although the measurable impacts of cross-border cooperation (CBC) on cohesion are limited, cooperation is understood to have a significant qualitative impact and quickly emerged as one of the central instruments of implementing the territorial cohesion agenda among Member States [76]. Increasingly necessitated by growing functional interdependencies between regions, cooperation also became a means to counteract socio-spatial "bordering" and "othering" processes [77].

Nevertheless, with the governing of space remaining a sensitive topic, affecting state sovereignty, territorial cohesion policy is still mainly adopted in territorial containers [66]. Rarely crossing national administrative divisions, it risks missing not only complex societal, but also environmental aspects for future sustainable development of European regions.

2.3. Green Growth, Post-Growth and the Challenge for a Development Beyond Compensatory Measures

Considering the above described approaches to governing territorial cohesion in the European Union, it becomes apparent that spatial policies tend to overlook localized inequities arising from global market dynamics and regional competition. Inequity, and thus the inequality resulting from the different access to resources, is strongly linked to spatial and environmental aspects, challenging the balanced development of territories [34]. As dysfunctional growth dynamics, which provide economic growth while lacking to positively add to the quality of life, continue to be largely unaffected by political instruments [34,78], there is the clear need to move beyond 'more of the same', redistributive

or compensatory logics, displaying 'development' under a linear growth premise. Especially since Meadows et al. pointed out the material boundaries of compound growth in their much-noticed work on the *Limits to Growth* in 1972 [79], material production and Western economism began to be questioned [6]. Introducing the term "degrowth" to radically criticize consumerism, growth-oriented development and market capitalism, the debate found its way into various academic discourses [2]. Understood as a consumption degrowth, work-time degrowth or physical degrowth, it was often narrowed down to GDP decrease [6]. However, as most social and economic institutions rely on continuous growth for present functioning, the debate started to involve discourse modes, political measures and instruments aiming for the reduction of economic performance [78]. Furthermore, approaches evolved around the ideas of "green growth" and "post-growth", often used simultaneously to call for sustainable development action. Nevertheless, while these two positions affect current political debates on development, they pose two opposing views [78]. Following an underlying modernization and innovation approach, "green growth" proponents postulate that economic growth is necessary to maintain and improve quality of life [6,78]. Believing that growth and development can take place without overstressing earth's ecological limits, this approach builds on an efficiency and marketization logic, following a GDP rationale [6]. In contrast, "degrowth" and "post-growth" are both seen as concepts where further economic growth in 'wealthier' countries is not necessary to maintain individual quality of life [2]. Assuming that quality of life can be secured or even increased through transformative processes of societal institutions, notwithstanding falling aggregate economic outputs, the approach is also viewed as creating the ground for alternative environmental visions and tackling aggressive resource (over)exploitation [2]. To counteract the current 'politics of waiting' [80], post-capitalist approaches are increasingly calling for alternative perspectives on development. Topics addressed range from micro-political tactics, the creation of alternative spaces, resilience-building strategies, decentralized decision making, common-goods oriented supply structures, collective forms of ownership, nonmonetary forms of exchange or voluntary simplicity [6]. In order to challenge the oversimplified assumptions of structural policies and their often ineffective translation into spatial categories, there is the need for stronger relational and justice-oriented thinking in planning approaches [6,43], based on criteria that better reflect regional diversity, varying needs and actual capabilities for development beyond linear growth premises.

However, over the past decade, the European Commission and the Member States have increasingly become keen supporters of the green growth approach. With current European strategies like the lately introduced "European Green Deal" [7] or the European cohesion policy post 2020 turning their focus mainly towards climate change related issues, such as a "greener and low-carbon Europe" [81], it seems important to address the concepts' shortcomings regarding a holistic territorial development. As growing criticism is being raised against the desirability of continuous economic growth for well-being, various approaches point out that GDP is an inadequate measure of human prosperity, as it solely aggregates all traded goods and services, notwithstanding their social or environmental effects [6,82,83]. The OECD [84] and the EU's own EPRS (European Policy Research Center) [85] have repeatedly pointed out the need to look beyond GDP figures in measuring well-being and progress and to better address the issues related to territorial governance [86]. Qualitative and quantitative research demonstrates that economic metrics often do not substantially correlate with area-wide well-being and, therefore, are an insufficient representation for equality and prosperity [6]. Hence, a change in perspective on social-environmental development is needed to ensure measures that go beyond policy 'greening' [87] and compensation, enabling mobilization for actual change and allowing for a territorial cohesion policy that is relevant and meaningful for sub-national actors [88].

3. Case Region, Materials and Methods

3.1. Case Region

To trace European policies' complex territorial dynamics in an economic and spatially heterogeneous context, we locate our empirical case study in the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region. Comprising sparsely populated immediate border regions along the so-called 'green belt'—also known as the former Iron Curtain—and prosperous urban agglomerations such as Vienna and Bratislava. The case region has a turbulent socio-political past and is engaged in re-development. Historically connected during the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918), it was separated through the Iron Curtain along the Austrian border during the Soviet era. Since 1989, cross-border connections have been forged anew, with the region growing closer again following the 2004 Eastern European enlargement and the end of border controls after the 2007 Schengen Agreement. As our case region's history reflects, Europe has long been characterized by the making and breaking of borders [89], creating new areas for development through the change of territorial units and the involvement of supranational territorial policies.

Nevertheless, still strongly categorized as inner peripheries [90], the legacies of long separation linger in the analyzed borderlands. With about 40% of EU territory being classed as border regions [91], the European project's philosophical concern with dismantling internal borders bears a significance for many regions. Therefore, to counteract the enduring socio-economic divides between new and old member states, the emphasis on territorial cohesion, especially through fostering cooperation, has gained importance. The Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region embodies the differences that territorial cohesion aims to overcome, especially with regards to the experienced separation, the persistent language barriers, different developmental states and variety in legal and planning systems, uniting an EU15 member state (Austria joined the EU in 1995) with three Eastern European EU states (joining in 2004). Choosing these heterogeneous borderlands, we aim to examine how current territorial cohesion policy plays out in a context of developmental difference and division.

3.2. Materials and Methods

The present empirical analysis follows a mixed-methods approach. We show the overall development in the case region based on regional data, combining it with a document analysis and explorative expert interviews. Due to the region's heterogeneity, we chose a multiple-case design [92]. To analyze territorial cohesion's shortcomings regarding a spatially just and sustainable regional development, we carried out a qualitative content analysis [93] on: (1) policy documents; (2) program documents of the three chosen INTERREG A programs (2014–2020), Austria-Czech Republic, Slovakia-Austria and Austria-Hungary; and (3) stakeholder interviews we held in 2018 in the case region. Conducting semi-structured expert interviews, mainly in the interviewees' native languages, we dealt with topics covering regional aspects of territorial cohesion. The topics ranged from the professional background of the interviewees and their understanding of the term 'territorial cohesion' to the past and present measures taken for cross-border development and cooperation; the focus areas and regional priority setting; the current program period; the actor network; the program implementation; the sustainability of the program measures and territorial cohesion policies' added value for the border region.

For the purpose of the present paper, we analyzed the sections assessing the stakeholders' perception of the current program measurement and evaluation, overall regional areas of action and problem definition, as well as their recommendations for the upcoming funding period. The face-to-face interviews (n = 25) were held with chosen representatives from national, federal and regional authorities involved in all three INTERREG V-A programs, as well as with representatives from regional planning agencies and national ministries in the case region. Since the group of stakeholders involved in managing European cohesion policy in the border region is relatively small and the actors are well-connected, the selection was based on their long-term experience, function in the cross-border

cooperation programs, as well as on internal recommendations. Therefore, we interviewed all Managing Authorities, long-term Joint Secretary staff, Regional Coordinators and experts such as ministerial representatives and regional development agency staff involved in European cross-border cooperation activities. However, the participants were guaranteed anonymity and will therefore not be identified in further detail. For the final synthesis of the results, we applied data triangulation [94], combining qualitative content analysis (applied on policy documents and interview material) with statistical data on regional development in the border region.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Urban-Rural Divergence and the Missing Redistribution of 'Justice'

Since the release of the Barca Report [95] in 2009, which aimed to overcome the “black box of cohesion policy” through proposing core priorities and measures for effective policy governance, a more strategic approach to territorial cohesion was introduced. However, given the remaining confusion when it comes to the policies’ handling [64,70,72], which left policies open for multiple localized conceptualizations [13,70,96], it is questionable whether, a decade after the report’s release, the European Commission managed to overcome the knowledge gap when it comes to capturing the policies’ regional impacts. With Eurostat’s database on Member States’ socio-economic and infrastructural data, as well as ESPON’s numerous maps and TIA (Territorial Impact Assessments) reports, there are unquestionably large amounts of national and regional statistics widely available. To give an overall impression on the spatial development in the case region, displayed by large scale data, we firstly looked at the regional GDP as PPS (Purchasing Power Standards) per inhabitant in percent of the EU 28 average (EU 28 = 100%). Representing the dispersion of data points around the mean in percent, we took into account the coefficient of variation (CV). The statistics in Figure 1 show that in the past decade (2006–2017) urban-rural disparities in Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary hardly decreased amongst the NUTS 2 regions [97]. It becomes evident that while Austrian regions show a rather homogenous development over time with a low CV, in contrast, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian regions tend to be strongly inhomogeneous with a higher CV. However, this changes when the capital regions are taken out, pointing towards growing inequalities between the national centers and other regions. While the capital of Austria, Vienna, has, as the only capital region, experienced decreasing GDP figures over the past decade, the other three capital regions’ GDP—those of Prague, Bratislava and Budapest—significantly increased [97]. Especially Slovakia’s capital, Bratislava, shows the strongest growth tendency compared to its surrounding regions. Thus, Slovakia also shows the highest CV (56.18% in 2017), followed by Hungary (CV 47.12% in 2017) and the Czech Republic (CV 41.9% in 2017), while Austria’s CV remains rather low (16.10% in 2017), indicating a more balanced distribution of the GDP amongst the regions.

However, the change in GDP for the individual NUTS 2 regions remained moderate during the observation period [97]. Overall, in the past decade, center regions have continued to outpace others in the concentration of GDP, showing different growth tendencies and pointing towards growing regional divergence, as already observed by Sala-i-Martin [58]. As all centers have remained above the EU GDP-average threshold since 2006 (and very likely before), their actual regional spillovers are questionable, rather pointing towards an economical decoupling from their surroundings. Given the small number of cases for the calculation, no sufficient conclusions can be drawn; thus, Figure 1 can only display a trend regarding the cases examined. Nonetheless, the regional categorization for ERDF and ESF (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) eligibility, grouping NUTS 2 regions into categories ranging from “less developed, transition” to “more developed” regions (see Figure 2) [98–101], backs our observation.

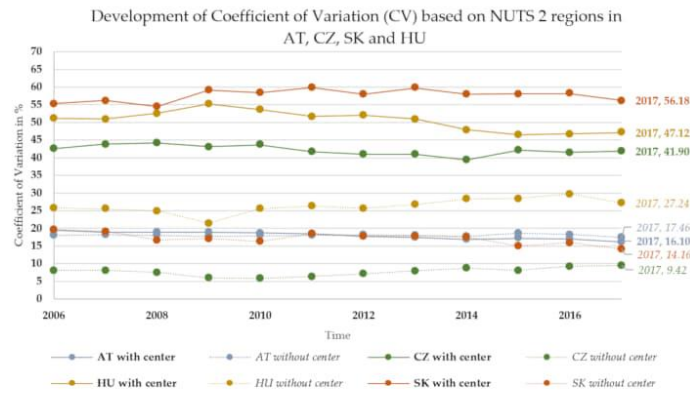


Figure 1. Coefficient of variation showing the development in % of AT (Austria), CZ (Czech Republic), SK (Slovakia) and HU (Hungary) NUTS 2 regions between 2006–2017, based on regional GDP (PPS per inhabitant in % of the EU 28 average; EU 28 = 100) (Source [97], own illustration).



Regional categorization for structural fund (European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund) eligibility 2014–2020.

- Less Developed Regions (GDP/head < 5% of EU-28 average)
- Transition Regions (GDP/head between >= 75% and < 90% of EU-28 average)
- More Developed Regions (GDP/head >= 90% of EU-28 average)

Figure 2. Structural fund (ERDF and ESF) eligibility for 2014–2020, Regional Categorization of NUTS 2 regions in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia (Source [98–101], own editing).

The urban-rural disparities shown in Figure 2, with regard to inequalities between the national center-regions (all yellow, GDP/head above 90% of EU 28-average), transition regions (orange only

in AT, GDP/head between 75% and 90% of EU 28-average) and less-developed regions (dark orange, GDP/head below 75% of the EU 28-average), are the most observable in Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Following this classification, it can be stated that non-center (economically weaker) regions have not managed to significantly bridge the GDP gap over the past decades [97].

Considering the aforementioned shortcomings of large-scale data, when it comes to the provision of comparable variables over time, we argue that these figures tell little about actual spatial dynamics on the ground. Measures of economic prosperity, such as GDP per head growth, un-/employment rate, demography, educational attainment, R&D expenditure, broadband connection, share of renewable energy, density of motorways/railways etc., are limited in capturing developments at a finer scale, such as sustainability or well-being in the funded regions. Meanwhile, documents such as DG REGIO's (EU's Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy) County Fact Sheets continue to deliver cross-country comparisons of performance displaying the "best and the worst performer in the Union" [101], while serving as the basis for programming period negotiations.

However, the overall lack of comprehensive data across territories, the often purely administrative coordination between statistical offices and stakeholders—especially in CBC programs—as well as the varying data collection methods still produce considerable data gaps [102]. Thus, there must be a stronger reflection on the limits of quantitative data, devoted to display one-dimensional growth dynamics. The displayed development tendencies in our case region only allow for the observation that, after eleven years of cohesion-related spending and almost two full funding periods, the decrease in European urban-rural disparities is more wishful thinking than a measurable reality.

4.2. Operationalizing and Implementing Territorial Cohesion Policies

Scientific attempts to define territorial cohesion have identified dimensions such as "socio-economic, environmental sustainability, territorial polycentricity and territorial cooperation/governance" [64], as well as characteristics clustered around concepts like "competitiveness, innovation, inclusion, environmental quality, energy, territorial structure, connection or governance" [13]. Aiming to clarify the concept in 2008, the European Commission identified and proposed three main fields of action [17]: the aim for "concentration" to overcome differences in density, for "connection" to tackle distance and remoteness, and for "cooperation" to counteract division [2]. However, the current handling of the policies still gives the impression of being more based on a 'we know it when we see it logic', missing the answer to the open, but crucial question: "how do we know it when we see it?" [70].

With differing processes of policy use, ranging from more flexible, participatory measures to normative ones, cohesion policy has been addressed in both constructivist and positivist approaches to planning [13]. However, ESPON's INTERCO project on developing indicators for territorial cohesion [103] already pointed out the clear links between well-being, cohesion and sustainability (Figure 3) in the understanding of the concept.

The project's final report identified sustainable development as being based on the principle of action (for change), the principle of ethics (set of values for economic, social and territorial equity) and the principle of integration (conceptual integration for a multidimensional approach) [103]. Furthermore, with sustainability being a component of well-being and cohesion, cohesion represents a horizontal component across the different dimensions of well-being (economic, social, environmental).

Seven years after the report's release, however, there is still no common understanding of territorial cohesion. As a result, there are no widely comparable indicators to capture the policies' dynamics across European territories to date [13,64]. Given the persistent urban-rural divide and growing regional disparities [9,90], the question of cohesion policies' added value to a balanced territorial development continues to be raised [3,104].

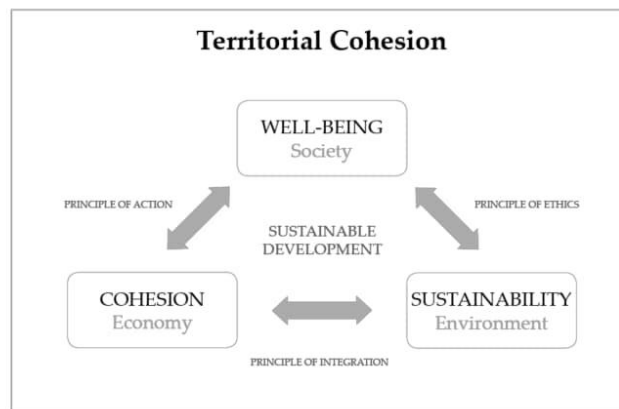


Figure 3. Dimensions and guiding principles of territorial cohesion (Source: [83]; own illustration).

With the European Union's spatial policies gaining influence on regional and national planning agendas in the past decades, their guiding principles are nevertheless shaping Member States' concepts, guidelines and strategic documents [48,105]. An example to demonstrate the lived dynamics of European territorial policies are the operational programs for cohesion policy implementation, which follow European legal framework guidelines while simultaneously being negotiated through the so-called programming process carried out by national and regional authorities. In our case region, the focus was laid on the three CBC programs INTERREG V-A Austria-Czech Republic (AT-CZ), INTERREG V-A Austria-Hungary (AT-HU) and INTERREG V-A Slovakia-Austria (SK-AT), analyzing the strategic documents for the programs' implementation. Reflecting on the main priorities set, we chose the *cooperation program documents*, the *evaluation plans*, to capture the programs' intended impacts and the *2018 Annual Implementation Report (AIR)* to show the present implementation 'success' for analysis. Thereby, we aim to show the development aims, measurement efforts and current implementation 'progress'.

Following the EU 2020 Strategy goals as their overarching framework, all programs must show a thematic concentration while adopting the same implementation logic. Selecting four priority fields from a pool of eleven Thematic Objectives, given by the Common Provisions Regulation [106], the priorities displayed in Table 1 were chosen in the case study region by the three analyzed cooperation programs.

Table 1. Thematic Objectives (TO) chosen by the three INTERREG V-A programs in the case study region (Source: [107–109]; own illustration).

Selected Thematic Objectives in the Case Study Region	
TO 1	Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
TO 3	Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
TO 6	Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency
TO 7	Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures
TO 10	Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning
TO 11	Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration

Together with the priority for Technical Assistance, the Thematic Objectives are further broken down into a maximum of seven Investment Priorities [110], with related Specific Objectives [111], measured through the so-called Result Indicators and Output Indicators (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Program implementation logic based on European strategic documents (Source: [106,110,111]; own illustration).

To give an overview of the program's structure, priorities and data used for measurement, we compare the three CBC programs with regard to their TO and IP while also briefly discussing the chosen SO, RI and OP. Overall, the Investment Priorities chosen in our case region are mainly clustered around the topics dealing with research and innovation, environmental protection and resource use, institutional capacities and public administration, education and training as well as with (sustainable) transport infrastructure [107–109]. However, there are noticeable individual differences in the focus setting between the three analyzed programs (Table 2).

Although the AT-CZ program and the SK-AT program have both chosen TO 1 as PA 1 to strengthen research, technological development and innovation, the Specific Objectives and the Result Indicators differ (capturing PA 1 1b, as displayed in Table 2, e.g., through 'hard' Eurostat data in the AT-CZ program, while conducting a survey on cooperation and participation in the SK-AT program). However, the AT-HU program chose TO 3 as PA 1 (Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs), thus showing differing regional needs and political orientations when it comes to economic infrastructure, compared to the two other programs, which did not choose this TO.

All three programs chose TO 6 as PA 2 in order to foster sustainable development in the program region. However, this priority shows strongly varying activities. Ranging from touristic measures aimed at the valorization of natural and cultural heritage (measured through overnight stays in the region) to the increase of eco-innovative potential, improvement of ecosystem services, management and protection of water bodies, to the management of ecological corridors. Looking more into detail, the proposed Output Indicator to measure the Result Indicators in the AT-CZ program surprisingly also includes the reconstruction of roads (up to 10 km). In contrast, the AT-HU program places raising awareness, training and research, as well as the protection of water bodies under that same priority. The SK-AT program furthermore sees the development of products and services for ecological networks and green infrastructure, cultural and natural heritage development and the increase of the expected number of visits at supported sites in line with the protected habitats' improved conservation status. Thus, it seems that this TO 6 is torn between providing a means for tourism promotion, touristic and road infrastructure, while simultaneously pursuing environmental and ecological measures.

Insufficient transnational transport infrastructures still seem to play a significant role in the border regions, as represented by TO 7. This TO has been chosen by the AT-HU and SK-AT program as PA 3, although with differing priorities, ranging from overall improvement of local infrastructure to the enhancement of sustainable mobility. In contrast, the AT-CZ program chose TO 10 as PA 3, investing in education, training and lifelong learning.

All programs chose the specific CBC TO 11 (Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration) as PA 4, addressing issues such as cross-border cooperation of communities and institutions through joint cultural, educational or community events, labor market and vocational training, or educational cooperation as shared challenges.

Table 2. INTERREG V-A programs in the case region, with chosen thematic and investment priorities (Source: [107–109]; own illustration).

Program	Thematic Objective	Priority Axis	Investment Priority
INTERREG AT-CZ	TO 1	PA 1 Strengthening research, technological development and innovation	IP 1a: Enhancing research and innovation (R&I) infrastructure and capacities to develop R&I excellence, and promoting centers of competence.
			IP 1b: Promoting business investment in R&I, developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centers and the higher education sector.
	TO 6	PA 2 Environment and resources	IP 6 c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage.
			IP 6 d: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil, and promoting ecosystem services through Natura 2000 and green infrastructure.
INTERREG AT-HU	TO 10	PA 3 Human resources development	IP 6 f: Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution.
	TO 11	PA 4 Sustainable networks and institutional cooperation	ETC Reg. Article 7 (a) iii: Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning.
	TO 3	PA 1 Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs	ETC Reg. Article 7 (a) iv: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting cooperation.
INTERREG AT-HU	TO 6	PA 2 Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency	IP 3d: Supporting the capacity of SMEs to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes.
			IP 6 c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage.
			IP 6 d: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil, and promoting ecosystem services through Natura 2000 and green infrastructure.
			IP 6 f: Promoting innovative technologies to improve environmental protection and resource efficiency in the waste sector, water sector and with regard to soil, or to reduce air pollution.

Table 2. Cont.

Program	Thematic Objective	Priority Axis	Investment Priority
INTERREG AT-HU	TO 7	PA 3 Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures	IP 7b: Enhancing regional mobility by connecting secondary and tertiary nodes to TEN-T infrastructure, including multimodal nodes.
			IP 7c: Developing and improving environmentally friendly (including low-noise) and low-carbon transport systems, in order to promote sustainable regional and local mobility.
	TO 11	PA 4 Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration	ETC Reg. Article 7 (a) iv: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting cooperation.
INTERREG SK-AT	TO 1	PA 1 Contributing to a smart cross-border-region	IP 1b: Promoting business investment in R&I, developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centers and the higher education sector.
	TO 6	PA 2 Fostering natural and cultural heritage and biodiversity	IP 6 c: Conserving, protecting, promoting and developing cultural and natural heritage. IP 6 d: Protecting and restoring biodiversity and soil, and promoting ecosystem services through Natura 2000 and green infrastructure.
	TO 7	PA 3 Supporting sustainable transport solutions	IP 7c: Developing and improving environmentally friendly (including low-noise) and low-carbon transport systems, in order to promote sustainable regional and local mobility.
	TO 11	PA 4 Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration	ETC Reg. Article 7 (a) iv: Enhancing institutional capacity of public authorities and stakeholders and efficient public administration by promoting cooperation.

With regards to the data collection used for the Result Indicators and Output Indicators, we overall observe a wide range of sources, including Eurostat data, national statistics, environmental databases, individual measurement tools and individually conducted surveys—even to capture the same IP. Thus, the methods differ not just between the priorities, but also when it comes to the measurement within the same TO across the programs.

In addition, the data collection methods for the programs' evaluation, carried out to assess program effects and impacts in the program region, although addressing the same topics, vary between the three

programs when it comes to the methodology used. Ranging between surveys among the beneficiaries, general data collection, data derived from the Electronic Monitoring System (eMS), website analytics, desk research, interviews, project reports, experimental and statistical methods, focus groups, expert panels etc., they are conducted internally or with the help of specialized agencies [112–114]. Therefore, we need to question the comparability of the reported effects and impacts of territorial cohesion policy measures across territories.

Taking the latest Annual Implementation Reports (AIR) for 2018 [115–117], it becomes apparent that—together with the delayed implementation of all three programs—they were not (or were only partially) able to meet the overall proposed performance framework regarding the milestones and financial implementation plans.

Table 3 shows the differing allocation of funding between the three programs in 2018, four years after the start of the funding period.

Table 3. Chosen cooperation program allocation of funding according to the three Annual Implementation Reports (AIR) 2018 reports for the Priority Axes 1–4, without Technical Assistance (Source: [107,115–117]; own illustration).

Program	PA 1	TO	PA 2	TO	PA 3	TO	PA 4	TO
AT-CZ	81%	TO 1	77%	TO 6	56%	TO 10	38%	TO 11
AT-HU	59%	TO 3	82%	TO 6	96%	TO 7	66%	TO 11
SK-AT	17%	TO 1	5%	TO 6	0%	TO 7	22%	TO 11

The AT-CZ program already allocated 81% to the PA 1, with 99% to IP 1a while IP 1b only holds 54% [115]. Therefore, research cooperation in R&I seems to be of higher priority than business investment for R&I in the program's region. With a total allocation of 77%, PA 2 indicates that while IP 6c (72%), aiming at the protection and conservation of cultural and natural heritage, and IP 6f (49%) are devoted to promoting innovative services and technologies for environmental protection, they show moderate tendencies of funding allocation; however, IP 6d, striving for protection and restoration of biodiversity and soil as well as the promotion of ecosystem services, has already over exceeded its planned budget (119%). However, PA 3, with IP 10a (56%), investing in education and training, and PA 4 (38%), aiming to enhance sustainable networks and institutional cooperation, are rather underemployed [2].

In comparison, the AT-HU program shows that only 59% of the funds are allocated for PA 1 IP 3d to enhance the competitiveness of the SMEs [116]. However, PA 2, aiming to protect the environment and promote resource efficiency, has already allocated 82% for all IP (6c, 6d, 6f). In contrast to the SK-AT program, PA 3, aiming at the promotion of sustainable transport and network infrastructures, shows a 96% utilization rate for IP 7b and 7c, while PA 4 (66%) points toward a moderate allocation.

Finally, the SK-AT program performance shows results difficult to compare. Due to the programs' late designation (August 2018) and implementation, PA 1 only reaches 17% of the target value for 2018 [117], aiming to foster research, technological development and innovation. With PA 2 and its IP (6c, 6d), aiming for the valorization of cultural and natural heritage and the management of ecological corridors, getting to only 5% of the 2018 target value, PA 3 and IP 7c, aiming at sustainable transport solutions, do not show any performances at all. PA 4, targeting the improvement of institutional capacity building and efficient public administration, however, reached 22% of the target value [2].

Overall, the programs' thematic focuses display similar development needs in the case region, although with slightly different priorities when it comes to investments. Considering, for example, TO 6, which aims to provide environmental and resource efficiency measures, the 'creative leeway' to cover multiple agendas becomes observable in all three programs. However, the different implementation states with regards to the programs' reported 'progress', point towards regional dynamics that are hardly addressed in the 2018 AIR, telling only little about the programs' development beyond a general

program ‘performance’. Moreover, the different evaluation approaches raise the question of whether comparable statements on the programs’ success can be made based on the provided data.

However, all three programs reflect the aforementioned dimensions of territorial cohesion in addressing societal (well-being), economic (cohesion) and environmental (sustainability) aspects of regional development. Nonetheless, the EU’s rationale, following a ‘do it—measure it—report it’ understanding of regional effects, seems to create multiple approaches to prove regional development, while also posing significant challenges for the program implementations in cross-border regions, making it difficult to understand the policies’ effects on a softer scale.

4.3. Regional Problem Definition, Implementation and Territorial Cohesion Post-2020

Considering the regional aspects of territorial cohesion policies, we asked the stakeholders for their problem definition and focus setting, challenges in the policy formulation and implementation, as well as their future wishes for the post-2020 program period. Thereby, we aim to address and display the ‘softer’ aspects of territorial policies and the regional practice of program drafting and implementation. According to the interviewees, the selection of regional priorities for cooperation programs is a multifaceted process, building on strategic national documents, studies, external consultants, evaluations from previous program periods and bilateral negotiation processes. Given that CBC programs are highly regionalized compared to transnational programs, the “funding pots” are also regarded as such. One interviewee thus points out that “every federal state tries to get the funds it has put into the program, so to speak, back out again through projects” [Int_10_1 2018: 2].

In addition to the already complex setting of different language and cultural backgrounds, there is also a slight imbalance of responsibilities in the decision-making process. In the centralist-organized countries, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, ministry representatives hold the responsibilities for decision making, while the regional representatives have mainly a consultancy function [Int_12_10_2, 16, 17, 18 2018]. Austria, in contrast, is organized in federal states that attach importance to the regional level in spatial planning differently [118]. Thus, regional representatives (the so-called Regional Coordinators) represent the program in all territorial decisions.

Overall, in the course of the programming process, the main challenge mentioned was to find the right amount of compromises, and “[...] balance between the interests [...] [to] write a program together, so that everyone can find [their priorities] again” [2]. With different development standards, the cooperating regions face the challenge that there are different views on “What is important in cross-border cooperation?” [2,4]. One interviewee points out an example from the Austria-Czech Republic program, noting that, while “[...] tourism, for example is still a big issue in the Czech Republic [or] the restoration of buildings [...], [i]n Austria, this is not or only partially important, [thus there are] [...] different weightings. You try to work this out somehow in the course of the programming and then write it into a program. And that builds the basis for the decision making” [2,4]. Similar dynamics are also observable in the other two CBC programs.

When it comes to the priorities set, however, the actors note that, overall, they did not change significantly over time for the three programs [Int_11_1, 13, 21, 23, 14 2018]. While the main focus on issues tackling tourism, natural and cultural heritage, infrastructure or language training remained constant, a stronger focus on R&D, institutional cooperation and issues targeting sustainable resource use developed more recently [Int_11_1, 14, 17, 18_1 2018]. Some actors point out that the only significant thematic shift was away from labor market related topics, that were under stronger focus in the previous program period (2007–2013) as a consequence of the Schengen Agreement and the EU Eastern enlargement [Int_9, 10, 11, 23 2018].

Instead, the actors highlighted the positive change in the intensity of the cooperation. The introduction of the ‘lead partner principle’ for the 2007–2013 program period and the changed framework conditions [Int_12_1, 13, 14_1 2018], led to a development where the “[...] [programs] have gone from INTERREG in cooperation with PHARE CBC [pre-accession CBC programs] to a joint INTERREG program” [Int_12_1 2018: 2]. Reflecting on that shift, a program actor concludes that “[a]t

the same time, this was a greater challenge because we really had to work out common topics [whereas before] it was more of a coexistence. That is, I take a partner who co-signs and acts as a ‘silent partner’ in a partnership, and everyone does—not what they want, of course under the motto of cooperation, but—more or less they run in parallel worlds [. . .]” [2].

However, measuring and reporting the programs’ cross-border dynamics remains a challenge for all programs. Capturing the program impacts, one program authority points out that, especially the indicator selection, alongside with the budget allocation, caused numerous debates and confusion. Thus, an external planning agency which supported the programming group “[. . .] had to just make something up. Of course, based on their experience and we trusted them on that back then. After all, the Commission has approved it, [although] [n]ow we are struggling a little bit with it.” [Int_8 2018: 7]. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the European Commission tends to follow a rather theoretical model with proposing the impact orientation, not reflecting on the reality of the programs and their only very limited impacts on socio-economic developments in the program regions [Int_18_2, 20 2018]. Although there is a strong commitment to the need to somehow quantify the projects’ progress in general, as one interviewee puts it, the indicators chosen tend to be “[. . .] very general, because you have so many different, diverse projects, that it is difficult to apply one single measure to everything. That’s why we still have the individual outputs for each project, which actually tell you more about the project. [Though] they will not be reported [to the Commission]. That is just to measure the progress of the project when a report comes in. But I must say, I find them more meaningful” [Int_17 2018: 15]. Taking this into account, the program’s ‘verifiable’ success when it comes to what is reported back to the European Commission seems to be mainly perceived through its ability to allocate funding in the set time periods [Int_17, 19_2 2018]. This puts the program authorities under intense pressure for continuous justification to meet the target thresholds, notwithstanding regional, socio-economic or administrative dynamics. CBC programs are being further torn between two legislative systems, with varying federal and national authorities involved in so-called first level and second level controls, as well as certifying authorities; this adds several complications and an enormous amount of bureaucracy to the already complex program implementation structure [Int_18_1 2018]. Also addressed through other CBC program assessments [74,119,120], all interviewed stakeholders pointed out their growing frustration with the administrative burden, often overshadowing the actual programs’ progress when it comes to their ability to fund projects that address the improvement of so-called ‘softer aspects’ and quality of life at the regional level (such as medical cooperation, environmental or joint education programs across the borders). One program actor, involved in more than one CBC program, states that there are “[. . .] far too many players with far too many different functions for only little money” [Int_18_1 2018: 7]. With the growing complexity of the programs creating the need for professionalization that leads to the decrease of smaller actors, such as non-governmental organizations [Int_2, 10_2, 12_1, 13, 16 2018], the imbalance regarding different co-financing rates and overall differing regulations across the participating countries also poses significant challenges for the program implementation in general [Int_10_1, 19_2 2018].

One interviewee, responsible for the program administration in the Joint Secretary, thus states that “[t]he project-specific and overall objectives and project results, these four levels alone, beneficiaries [. . .] cannot make out a difference easily. [. . .]. [The] differences in the wording are hardly perceptible [. . .]. [So] it has [. . .] become too complicated and the simplification is not always successful either. Especially when it comes to personnel cost accounting, but also some others. [Additionally], the controlling bodies want to make sure that the old principles [. . .] are maintained, [opting for] one hundred percent security [. . .], [and thus], some people create extra rules to secure themselves with—it’s called gold-plating—and I think it’s everywhere [. . .]” [Int_13 2018: 9]. Thus, with INTERREG becoming a mainstream program, “[. . .] the flexibility and the contribution to European integration is increasingly neglected. Because [with the] program [. . .] having to meet the EU 2020 targets and contributing to impact indicators, this is increasingly a challenge. Whether this is an improvement is

hard to tell. However, the balancing act becomes even greater at the level of administrative processing” [Int_12_1 2018: 7], one interviewee summarizes the current situation.

Reflecting on these obstacles, we also asked the stakeholders to give recommendations and state future wishes for territorial cohesion policy when it comes to the upcoming planning period. Unsurprisingly, almost all actors point out the need for a decrease of the administrative burden and bureaucracy for all program levels, together with effective simplification measures in order to make the program attractive again and counteract decreasing project application numbers [Int_8, 9, 10_2, 11_2, 17, 16, 20 2018]. An interviewee states that she wishes “[...] that programs are downgraded back to a tolerable level of administration [...] so that they can do what they actually intend to do, namely, to promote good cross-border projects in a way that the project partners are able to implement the projects” [Int_10_2 2018: 14f.]. Furthermore, she notes that “Of course there have to be controls, [...] we are talking about public money, but the way we are currently handling [the programs] is just beyond good and evil. So [if this remains the same], we can actually stop [doing what we do] because it is simply too costly for all parties involved” [2]. Another program authority also states that although there are definitely a lot innovative project ideas in general, these ideas are often not realized, as applicants cannot handle the administration requirements, often already struggling with the application forms. As a result, there are many projects building on old partnerships, creating a ‘more of the same’ continuance when it comes to the project landscape [Int_16 2018: 3].

Calling for greater continuity where possible with regard to the upcoming program period [Int_11_2, 19, 22 2018], the actors furthermore refer to the burden of being forced to start all over again every seven years. Criticizing the often missing cross-border planning character, with a largely thematic instead of a content-based focus, they also view the programs as being more a means for national/regional distribution of funding, rather than planning in functional regions based on their needs, capabilities and interdependencies across national borders [Int_9, 11_1, 23 2018]. Therefore, concluding on these developments, one interviewed actor notes that he believes “[...] that cross-border cooperation itself is a value, although this is hardly derivable from statistical indicators,” thus asking further: “how can we say that the program is successful then?” [Int_13 2018: 19]. Answering this question, he pointedly states that the “program is successful, because we build up a relatively stable cooperation, even in the constantly changing institutional and personal [settings] [...], we can put this cooperation back on its feet; because we continuously learn from each other; because the learning process is mutual, both at project and program level, because the demand for cross-border co-financing—not only for financing – but for the cross-border projects, for cross-border cooperation, is there and new developments, new project ideas, new innovative ideas are constantly emerging. I think that is in itself a success” [2].

Reflecting on the statements discussed, the tensions between the current program logics and local capabilities for development become apparent. Drawing from an analysis of the French–German PAMINA cross-border region, Terlouw [74] already highlighted the structural mismatches between the scales of different cross-border relations. Pointing out the vertical mismatches, linked to the differences in the horizontal logics of economic and administrative cross-border relations, he has shown the disconnection of regional success of European economic integration from the cross-border region. Picking up Nussbaum’s [26] critique on macroeconomic synthetic indicators to measure developmental progress, we need to ask whether the current representation of ‘success’ allows to actually induce sustainable territorial development (beyond GDP figures), or rather serves the maintenance of the regional status quo.

Taking into account the empirical findings, which showcase the differences between the integration and implementation of cohesion policy goals in regional development, we do, on the one hand, confirm observations of related studies on cross-border cooperation when it comes to the distributive logics of European policy measures [121–125]. However, we also show that regional diversity creates uneven impacts when using uniform policy interventions and illustrate the context and scale dependency of the perception of sustainable development and spatial justice in the analyzed regions.

5. Conclusions

Pointing out the growing critique on supranational cohesion policies' continued following of a growth narrative, rather than a development one, we identify the need for alternative approaches to a spatially just development. Tracing these ideas through literature, we furthermore demonstrate the complementarity of emerging concepts of post-growth and spatial justice informed by the capabilities approach to development. Rarely crossing borders according to actual regional interdependencies, present European territorial policy approaches seem to be more about resource distribution than actual spatial organization and planning, thus failing to address rising territorial inequalities in the analyzed regions. Turning to an analysis of regional statistics, CBC program documents and empirical data from the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region, we highlight the need for change from current GDP-based growth models towards heterogeneity and plural paths to transformative futures. Against the backdrop of persisting urban-rural disparities and continuing spatial inequality in the past decade, the ongoing 'more of the same' administrative routine allows for a perception of 'success', that is mainly based on the allocation of funding and seems comfortable with the status quo as long as in- and outward payments are at equilibrium. Considering sustainability to be a central dimension of territorial cohesion's aim for balanced development, however, growing disparities additionally put those regions at danger which are often already the most vulnerable when it comes to social, economic and environmental inequality.

Nevertheless, current development measures seem to lead towards the continuance of existing spatial inequalities across the investigated border regions. The analyzed data indicate that using the current growth-driven approaches to development does not capture the dimensions of territorial cohesion at the regional scale adequately, instead mirroring a catch-up-driven struggle for locational competition. In contrast to other approaches, we thus identify the right to difference through a spatial justice perspective, as bearing the potential to transition territorial cohesion to a post-growth paradigm for a more spatially just and sustainability-oriented policy. Concluding on the presented literature and the discussed empirical findings, we point out two central dimensions of spatial justice relevant for future planning approaches. Firstly, capability-oriented approaches must stronger address horizontal aspects of justice, dealing with the access to and provision of resources (e.g., to democratic and legal institutions, labor market, welfare state, social and community systems, infrastructure, housing, transportation or environmental 'goods'). Secondly, spatial policies also need to reflect on vertical aspects of justice, such as the participative capabilities when it comes to just power relations to avoid dependency, dominance and oppression [11,16,19,26,38,43,126].

In calling for the 'right to not catch up', we do not intend to romanticize rurality, the dismantling of infrastructure, the refusal of change, or even more assent to leaving regions behind. Rather, we describe two inter-related shifts in regional development policy and discourse. Regionalizing spatial justice calls attention not only to how spaces are occupied, but also to how they are measured and assessed. If we are to accept that regions have the right to determine and pursue meaningful futures according to their own needs, contexts and endogenous capabilities, we cannot presume that their progress can be measured along a singular, economic-based development path. However, this is the fundamental flaw in current approaches to territorial cohesion. Shifting the perspective from an economic race with rules set by the winners, outcomes dependent on continuous growth and a system multiplying non-comparable outcomes, this leads us to insist on the 'right to not catch up' as a thought experiment that interlinks spatial justice and territorial sustainability. In doing so, our contribution joins long-running critiques on territorial cohesion implementation and measurement, increasing dissatisfaction with business-as-usual models, as well as calls for genuine action in spatial policies to mitigate negative climate change impacts.

Additionally, with the European Member States' growing emphasis on the protection of their sovereignty and autonomy, present policy handling runs the risk of missing the aim for cross-national coordination of environmental, climate and social policy action. Against the background of current global upheavals, adding to climate change and growing socio-economic inequalities, as well as with

the ongoing transition into the new funding period (2021–2027), it seems to be the right moment to call for a changed perspective to sustainable territorial development. In this context, a comprehensive approach based on the capabilities of the regions seems to be best suited to initiate green and just policy approaches. There are several reasons why we believe that the European Commission ought to take a keen interest in spatial justice. First, as our case region suggests, a shift from ‘catch up’ discourses to spatial justice could help maintain and strengthen the Member States’ commitment to the supranational community, including by considering differing political cultures. Second, by foregrounding regional capabilities, spatial justice could initiate a more sensible use of funds and thereby help address spatial inequalities (more) specifically, in more context-related ways, and relevant to the regional actors—to those governing and also those being the recipients of the policies’ measures. In turn, by thinking differently about how to mitigate regional disparities beyond a dependency-based framework, regions would be enabled to take on more responsibility for their development. Finally, at a time when cohesion policy is clearly under pressure and arguably in crisis [9,127], spatial justice holds the potential to renew the fundamental ambitions for European peacekeeping as well as territorial cohesion. In this sense, spatial justice does not interfere with the object of territorial cohesion but marks a much-needed shift from fuzzy fragmentation [70] to sustainable human and environmental flourishing.

Hence, we urge for attention to spatial justice and sustainability as two sides of the same coin, neither met with one-dimensional interventions in funding mechanisms, nor ‘greening’ existing growth models. Given the fact that the current economic logics do not apply the same way to regions as they (in theory) do for markets, and no ‘invisible hand’ will regulate the European regions’ fate, there is the need for developing future practicable alternatives and the deconstruction of present assessment logics. Furthermore, in order to gain knowledge on the policies’ actual added value to regional development, there should be a stronger distinction between territorial cohesion’s long-term social-spatial effects, such as trust-building and the establishment of new governance structures, as well as short-term, ‘hard’ data-driven ‘correlations’, such as the reconstruction of natural and cultural heritage and regional overnight stays. However, since present approaches to the policies’ outcomes seem to actively take into account trade-offs in significance in favor of (relative) data comparability, by leaving out the regional context, cohesion policy measures are unlikely to truly tackle the actual challenges ahead. Since current indicators for ‘success’ and ‘failure’ do not display regional dynamics adequately, a change of perspective is needed to actually address the recurring question of whether structurally weak regions, despite their ‘not catching up’, should continue to get European funding at all.

Above all, European territorial policy needs stronger interlinking with regional planning instruments, as these are currently running parallel, in order to actually address ongoing development challenges of European regions. It is only by addressing the similarities and differences of regions adequately through policy re-scaling, a stronger coordination of European, national and regional goals for development and the alignment of planning horizons, that regional visions get the actual chance to be operationalized and implemented in local contexts. Overlooking current policy limitations and keeping the present approach towards development may lead to even more social-spatial polarization at the expense of environmental aspects [34], territorial cohesion and thus sustainable territorial development [128]. Therefore, further research on the methodology for and operationalization of spatial justice, as well as on its options and limitations is needed to better understand the relationship between the added value presented by the respective approach and the necessary concessions. The pressing need for genuinely sustainable solutions for Europe’s diverse regions in today’s challenging times surely makes the effort of finding answers for complex questions worthwhile.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, B.D. and T.F.; methodology, B.D. and T.F.; software B.D.; validation, B.D.; formal analysis, B.D.; investigation, B.D.; resources, B.D. and T.F.; writing—Original draft preparation, B.D.; writing—Review and editing, B.D., T.F. and J.S.; visualization, B.D.; supervision, T.F. and J.S.; project administration, B.D.; funding acquisition, T.F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the Department of Social Affairs of the Federal State of Lower Austria, within the framework of the *Social Planning in Rural Areas* project, as part of the ECONet - Economic and Political Development in Rural Areas—program.

Acknowledgments: We thank the research participants for their time, their insights and their confidence to support this research. The open access publishing was supported by the BOKU Vienna Open Access Publishing Fund.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

References

1. CEC. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions—European Values in the Globalised World. Contribution of the Commission to the October Meeting of Heads of State and Government. COM (2005) 525 final/2. 2005. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2005:0525:FIN> (accessed on 14 April 2020).
2. Péti, M. A territorial understanding of sustainability in public development. *Environ. Impact Assess. Rev.* **2012**, *32*, 61–73. [CrossRef]
3. Luukkonen, J. Territorial cohesion policy in the light of peripherality. *Town Plan. Rev.* **2010**, *81*, 445–466. [CrossRef]
4. Rauhut, D.; Humer, A. EU Cohesion Policy and spatial economic growth: Trajectories in economic thought. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2020**, *3*, 1–18. [CrossRef]
5. Campbell, J. A Note on Growth Poles. *Growth Chang.* **1974**, *5*, 43–45. [CrossRef]
6. Schmid, B. Degrowth and postcapitalism: Transformative geographies beyond accumulation and growth. *Geogr. Compass* **2019**, *13*, 59. [CrossRef]
7. CEC. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. In *The European Green Deal*; COM (2019) 640 final; CEC, Ed.; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 2019.
8. ESPON. Climate Change May Hamper Territorial Cohesion. Climate Change and Europe's Regions. 2013. Available online: <https://www.espon.eu/climate-2012> (accessed on 14 April 2020).
9. Schoene, M. European disintegration? Euroscepticism and Europe's rural/urban divide. *Eur. Politics Soc.* **2018**, *20*, 348–364. [CrossRef]
10. Young, I.M. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA; Oxford, UK, 1990; ISBN 0691023158.
11. Dikeç, M. Justice and the Spatial Imagination. *Environ. Plan A* **2001**, *33*, 1785–1805. [CrossRef]
12. Nussbaum, M.C.; Sen, A. (Eds.) *The Quality of Life. Conference: Papers*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1993; ISBN 9780198287971.
13. Dao, H.; Plagnat Cantoreggi, P.; Rousseaux, V. Operationalizing a contested concept: Indicators of territorial cohesion. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2017**, *25*, 638–660. [CrossRef]
14. Sen, A. *Development as Freedom*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2001; ISBN 0192893300.
15. Fukuda-Parr, S.; Shiva Kumar, A.K. (Eds.) *Readings in Human Development. Concepts, Measures and Policies for a Development Paradigm*, 2nd ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2005; ISBN 0195670523.
16. Davies, B. Social Needs and Resources in Local Services. *Public Adm.* **1970**, *48*, 214–216. [CrossRef]
17. Lefebvre, H. *La Révolution Urbaine*; Gallimard: Paris, France, 1970; ISBN 9782070352166.
18. Harvey, D. *Social Justice and the City*; Edward Arnold: London, UK, 1976; ISBN 0713156872.
19. Fainstein, S.S. *The Just City*; Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, USA, 2010; ISBN 0801446554.
20. Soja, E.W. *Seeking Spatial Justice*; University of Minnesota Press: Bristol, UK; University Presses Marketing: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2010; ISBN 0816666687.
21. Soja, E.W. *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*; Verso: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2011; ISBN 9781844676699.
22. Fainstein, S.S. Competitiveness, Cohesion, and Governance: Their Implications for Social Justice. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* **2001**, *25*, 884–888. [CrossRef]
23. Storper, M. Justice, efficiency and economic geography: Should places help one another to develop? *Eur. Urban Reg. Stud.* **2011**, *18*, 3–21. [CrossRef]

24. Sen, A.K. The idea of justice. *Soc. Choice Welf.* **2010**, *35*, 709–720.
25. Nussbaum, M.C. *Women and Human Development. The Capabilities Approach*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2008; ISBN 9780521003858.
26. Nussbaum, M.C. *Creating Capabilities. The Human Development Approach*, 1st ed.; The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA; London, UK, 2013; ISBN 9780674050549.
27. Balibar, É. *La Crainte des Masses. Politique et Philosophie Avant et Après Marx*; Galilée: Paris, France, 1997; ISBN 271860462X.
28. Pirie, G.H. On Spatial Justice. *Environ. Plan A* **1983**, *15*, 465–473. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Nord, M. Poor people on the move: County-to-county migration and the spatial concentration of poverty. *J. Reg. Sci.* **1998**, *38*, 329–351. [[CrossRef](#)]
30. Mackett, R.L.; Thoreau, R. Transport, social exclusion and health. *J. Transp. Health* **2015**, *2*, 610–617. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Levitas, R. *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*; Palgrave Macmillan Ltd.: Basingstoke, UK, 2005; ISBN 9781403944276.
32. Levitas, R. The concept of social exclusion and the new Durkheimian hegemony. *Crit. Soc. Policy* **1996**, *16*, 5–20. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Mohai, P.; Pellow, D.; Roberts, J.T. Environmental Justice. *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* **2009**, *34*, 405–430. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Faburel, G. The Environment as a Factor of Spatial Injustice: A New Challenge for the Sustainable Development of European Regions? In *Sustainable Development: Policy and Urban Development—Tourism, Life Science, Management and Environment*; Ghenai, C., Ed.; IntechOpen: London, UK, 2012. [[CrossRef](#)]
35. Wallerstein, I.M. *The Politics of the World-Economy*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1984; ISBN 0521277604.
36. Ottaviano, G.I.P. Monopolistic competition, trade, and endogenous spatial fluctuations. *Reg. Sci. Urban Econ.* **2001**, *31*, 51–77. [[CrossRef](#)]
37. Coenen, L.; Benneworth, P.; Truffer, B. Toward a spatial perspective on sustainability transitions. *Res. Policy* **2012**, *41*, 968–979. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Smith, D.M. *Geography and Social Justice*; Blackwell: Oxford, UK, 1994; ISBN 0631190260.
39. Shi, L.; Chu, E.; Anguelovski, I.; Aylett, A.; Debats, J.; Goh, K.; Schenk, T.; Seto, K.C.; Dodman, D.; Roberts, D.; et al. Roadmap towards justice in urban climate adaptation research. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* **2016**, *6*, 131–137. [[CrossRef](#)]
40. Urkidi, L.; Walter, M. Dimensions of environmental justice in anti-gold mining movements in Latin America. *Geoforum* **2011**, *42*, 683–695. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Omstedt, M. Reinforcing unevenness: Post-crisis geography and the spatial selectivity of the state. *Reg. Stud. Reg. Sci.* **2016**, *3*, 99–113. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Stiglitz, J.E.; Sen, A.; Fitoussi, J.-P. *Mismeasuring Our Lives. Why GDP Doesn't Add up*; New Press: New York, NY, USA, 2010; ISBN 9781595585196.
43. Fainstein, S.S. Spatial Justice and Planning. In *Readings in Planning Theory*, 3rd ed.; Fainstein, S.S., Campbell, S., Eds.; Wiley-Blackwell: Malden, MA, USA, 2012; ISBN 9781119084679.
44. Niebuhr, A.; Stiller, S. Territorial Disparities in Europe. *Intereconomics* **2003**, *38*, 156–164. [[CrossRef](#)]
45. Bachtler, J.; Martins, J.O.; Wostner, P.; Zuber, P. *Towards Cohesion Policy 4.0*; Routledge: Oxon, UK; Taylor & Francis Group: New York, NY, USA, 2019; ISBN 9780429282058.
46. Brenner, N. Globalisation as Reterritorialisation: The Re-scaling of Urban Governance in the European Union. *Urban Stud.* **1999**, *36*, 431–451. [[CrossRef](#)]
47. Brenner, N. The limits to scale? Methodological reflections on scalar structuration. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* **2001**, *25*, 591–614. [[CrossRef](#)]
48. Dühr, S.; Stead, D.; Zonneveld, W. The Europeanization of spatial planning through territorial cooperation. *Plan. Pract. Res.* **2007**, *22*, 291–307. [[CrossRef](#)]
49. van Houtum, H. III European perspectives on borderlands. *J. Borderl. Stud.* **2000**, *15*, 56–83. [[CrossRef](#)]
50. Tvrdon, M. Cohesion Policy, Convergence and Regional Disparities: The Case of the European Union. *WSEAS Trans. Bus. Econ.* **2012**, *9*, 89–99.
51. CEC. *ESDP—European Spatial Development Perspective. Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the European Union*; Office for Official Public of the European Communities: Luxembourg, 1999; ISBN 9282876586.

52. CEC. *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee; Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, turning territorial diversity into strength* COM (2008) 616 final; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 2008.
53. EC. *White Paper on the Future of Europe. Reflections and Scenarios for the EU27 by 2025* COM (2017) 2025; EC: Brussels, Belgium, 2017.
54. Perroux, F. Economic Space: Theory and Applications. *Q. J. Econ.* **1950**, *64*, 89. [CrossRef]
55. Hirschman, A.O. *The Strategy of Economic Development*; Norton: New York, NY, USA, 1958; ISBN 0813374197.
56. Sassen, S. *The Global City. New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed.; Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, USA; Oxford, UK, 2001; ISBN 9781400847488.
57. Mouque, D. *A Survey of Socio-economic Disparities between the Regions of the EU*; No. 2; EIB Papers: Luxembourg, 2000; Volume 5, pp. 13–24.
58. Sala-i-Martin, X.X. Regional cohesion: Evidence and theories of regional growth and convergence. *Eur. Econ. Rev.* **1996**, *40*, 1325–1352. [CrossRef]
59. Ezcurra, R.; Gil, C.; Pasqual, P. Regional Bipolarization: The Case of the European Union. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* **2005**, *29*, 984–995. [CrossRef]
60. Muliček, O.; Malý, J. Moving towards more cohesive and polycentric spatial patterns? Evidence from the Czech Republic. *Pap. Reg. Sci.* **2019**, *98*, 1177–1194. [CrossRef]
61. van Gorp, N. Backwardness of Border Regions. *Tijdschr. Voor Econ. Soc. Geogr.* **2009**, *100*, 358–364. [CrossRef]
62. Faludi, A. *Territorial Cohesion and the European Model of Society*; Lincoln Institute of Land Policy: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2007; ISBN 1558441662.
63. EC. *Communication from the Commission—Europe 2020. A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* COM (2010) 2020; EC: Brussels, Belgium, 2010.
64. Medeiros, E. Territorial Cohesion: An EU concept. *Eur. J. Spat. Dev.* **2016**, *60*, 1–30.
65. Mirwaldt, K.; McMaster, L.; Bachtler, J. *Reconsidering Cohesion Policy: The Contested Debate on Territorial Cohesion*; EoRPA Paper 08/5 No. 66; European Policies Research Centre: Glasgow, UK, 2008.
66. Faludi, A. EU territorial cohesion, a contradiction in terms. *Plan. Theory Pract.* **2016**, *17*, 302–313. [CrossRef]
67. Doucet, P. Territorial Cohesion of Tomorrow: A Path to Cooperation or Competition? *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2006**, *14*, 1473–1485. [CrossRef]
68. Evers, D. A Solution in Search of a Problem: A ‘Garbage Can’ Approach to the Politics of Territorial Cohesion. *Eur. J. Spat. Dev.* **2012**, *45*, 1–24.
69. Evers, D. Reflections on Territorial Cohesion and European Spatial Planning. *Tijdschr. Voor Econ. Soc. Geogr.* **2008**, *99*, 303–315. [CrossRef]
70. Demeterova, B.; Goodwin-Hawkins, B.; Fischer, T. Conceptualisations of Territorial Cohesion in Central European border regions. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2020**, *29*, 1–20. [CrossRef]
71. van Well, L. Conceptualizing the Logics of Territorial Cohesion. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2012**, *20*, 1549–1567. [CrossRef]
72. Abrahams, G. What “Is” Territorial Cohesion? What Does It “Do”? Essentialist Versus Pragmatic Approaches to Using Concepts. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2014**, *22*, 2134–2155. [CrossRef]
73. Begg, I. Cohesion or Confusion: A Policy Searching for Objectives. *J. Eur. Integr.* **2010**, *32*, 77–96. [CrossRef]
74. Terlouw, K. The discrepancy in PAMINA between the European image of a cross-border region and cross-border behaviour. *Geojournal* **2008**, *73*, 103–116. [CrossRef]
75. CEC. *Europe 2000 Outlook for the Development of the Community’s Territory: A preliminary Overview*. 1991. Available online: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b1380f75-b5c2-4deb-94b4-49ab9a6c853b/language-en> (accessed on 14 April 2020).
76. CEC. *Europe 2000+. Cooperation for European Territorial Development*; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 1995; ISBN 9282620913.
77. van Houtum, H.; van Naerssen, T. Bordering, Ordering and Othering. *Tijdschr. Voor Econ. Soc. Geogr.* **2002**, *93*, 125–136. [CrossRef]
78. Petschow, U.; Aus dem Moore, N.; Pissarskoi, E.; Korfhage, T.; Lange, S.; Schoofs, A.; Hofmann, D. Social Well-being within Planetary Boundaries. The Precautionary Post-growth Approach. Interim Report of the Project “Approaches to Resource Conservation in the Context of Post-Growth Concepts” No. 89. 2018. Available online: https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/1410/publikationen/uba_texte_89_2018_precautionary_post-growth_approach_executive_summary.pdf (accessed on 14 April 2020).

79. Meadows, D.H.; Meadows, D.L.; Randers, J.; Behrens, W.W. *The Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*; Universe Books: New York, NY, USA, 1972; ISBN 0876631650.
80. Pickerill, J.; Chatterton, P. Notes towards autonomous geographies: Creation, resistance and self-management as survival tactics. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* **2006**, *30*, 730–746. [CrossRef]
81. CEC. Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Laying down Common Provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and Financial Rules for Those and for the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Border Management and Visa Instrument; COM (2018) 375 final; 2018. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2018%3A375%3AFIN> (accessed on 17 April 2020).
82. Rosa, H.; Henning, C. *The Good Life beyond Growth. New Perspectives*, 1st ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2017; ISBN 9781315542126.
83. Pye, S. Review/Update of EEU MACCs. 2008. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1672&langId=en> (accessed on 16 April 2020).
84. Boarini, R.; Johansson, A.; Mira d'Ercole, M. Alternative Measures of Well-being; OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 33. 2006. Available online: <https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/36165332.pdf> (accessed on 4 April 2020).
85. Davies, R. Measuring Well-Being and Progress. Looking beyond GDP. 2014. Available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140738REV1-Measuring-well-being-and-progress-FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 16 April 2020).
86. Zaucha, J.; Böhme, K. Measuring territorial cohesion is not a mission impossible. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2020**, *28*, 627–649. [CrossRef]
87. Lenschow, A. *Environmental Policy Integration. Greening Sectoral Policies in Europe*; Earthscan Publications: London, UK, 2002; ISBN 1853837083.
88. Adams, N.; Cotella, G.; Nunes, R. The Engagement of Territorial Knowledge Communities with European Spatial Planning and the Territorial Cohesion Debate: A Baltic Perspective. *Eur. Plan. Stud.* **2014**, *22*, 712–734. [CrossRef]
89. Green, S. Borders and the Relocation of Europe. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol.* **2013**, *42*, 345–361. [CrossRef]
90. ESPON. PROFECY—Processes, Features and Cycles of Inner Peripheries in Europe. Inner Peripheries: National Territories Facing Challenges of Access to Basic Services of General Interest. Final Report. 2017. Available online: <https://www.espon.eu/inner-peripheries> (accessed on 12 April 2020).
91. CEC. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Boosting Growth and Cohesion in EU Border Regions. COM (2017) 534 Final. 2017. Available online: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2017%3A534%3AFIN> (accessed on 2 April 2020).
92. Yin, R.K. *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014.
93. Silverman, D. *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, 3rd ed.; SAGE: London, UK, 2006; ISBN 1412922453.
94. Boyatzis, R.E. *Transforming Qualitative Information. Thematic Analysis and Code Development*; Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA; London, UK, 1998; ISBN 0761909613.
95. Barca, F. An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy. A Place-based Approach to Meeting European Union Challenges and Expectations. 2009. Available online: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report_/barca_report_en.pdf (accessed on 15 March 2020).
96. Zonneveld, W.; Waterhout, B. Visions on territorial cohesion. *Town Plan. Rev.* **2005**, *76*, 14–27. [CrossRef]
97. Eurostat. Regional Gross Domestic Product (PPS per Inhabitant in % of the EU28 Average/EU28 = 100) by NUTS 2 Regions. Available online: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tgs00006> (accessed on 29 March 2019).
98. EC. Country Fact Sheet. Slovensko. 2015. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-slovakia (accessed on 10 February 2020).
99. EC. Country Fact Sheet. Česká Republika. 2015. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-fact-sheet-czech-republic (accessed on 10 February 2020).
100. EC. Country Fact Sheet. Österreich. 2015. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-austria (accessed on 10 February 2020).

101. EC. Country Fact Sheet. Magyarország. 2015. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-hungary (accessed on 10 February 2020).
102. ESPON. Territorial Impact Assessment for Cross-Border Cooperation. Targeted Analysis—Final Report. 2019. Available online: <https://www.espon.eu/TIA-CBC> (accessed on 4 February 2020).
103. ESPON; INTERCO. Indicators of Territorial Cohesion. Final Report. 2013. Available online: https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/INTERCO_Final-Report_Part-C_Scientific-Report.pdf (accessed on 5 February 2020).
104. Mairate, A. The ‘added value’ of European Union Cohesion policy. *Reg. Stud.* **2006**, *40*, 167–177. [CrossRef]
105. Marques, T.S.; Saraiva, M.; Santinha, G.; Guerra, P. Re-Thinking Territorial Cohesion in the European Planning Context. *Int. J. Urban Reg. Res.* **2018**, *42*, 547–572. [CrossRef]
106. CEC. Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006; 1303/2013; CEC, Ed.; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 2013.
107. INTERREG AT-CZ. Cooperation Programme AT-CZ 2014–2020. Final Version. 2015. Available online: <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
108. INTERREG AT-HU. Cooperation Programme AT-HU 2014–2020. Version 3.0. 2018. Available online: <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
109. INTERREG SK-AT. Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria Cooperation Programme. Version 11th June 2015. 2015. Available online: <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
110. CEC. Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for Growth and Jobs Goal and Repealing REGULATION (EC) No 1080/2006; 1301/2013; CEC, Ed.; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 2013.
111. CEC. Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on Specific Provisions for the Support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European Territorial Cooperation Goal; 1299/2013; CEC, Ed.; CEC: Brussels, Belgium, 2013.
112. INTERREG AT-CZ. Bewertungsplan Kooperationsprogramm INTERREG V-A Österreich—Tschechische Republik. 17.05.2018 Beschlossene Version 3. 2018. Available online: <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
113. INTERREG AT-HU. Evaluation Plan. Final Version as Approved by the MC on 14 December 2016. 2016. Available online: <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
114. INTERREG SK-AT. INTERREG V-A Programme Slovak Republic—Austria 2014–2020 Evaluation Plan. Version 2.0 12/12/2018. 2018. Available online: <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
115. INTERREG AT-CZ. Annual Implementation Report 2018. 21-Jun-2019. 2019. Available online: <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
116. INTERREG AT-HU. Annual Implementation Report 2018. Reporting period: 01.01.2018–31.12.2018. 2018. Available online: <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed on 20 March 2020).
117. INTERREG SK-AT. Annual Implementation Report 2018. June 2019. 2018. Available online: <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed on 18 March 2020).
118. Stöglehner, G. (Ed.) *Grundlagen der Raumplanung 1. Theorien, Methoden, Instrumente*, 1st ed.; Facultas: Wien, Austria, 2019; ISBN 3708913825.
119. Kurowska-Pysz, J.; Cargnin, A.P.; Lemos, B.D.O.; Rückert, A.A. The Assessment of the INTERREG VA Program. In *Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) Strategies for Sustainable Development*; Castanho, R.A., Ed.; Engineering Science Reference: Hershey, PA, USA, 2020; pp. 43–69. ISBN 9781799825135.
120. EC. Easing Legal and Administrative Obstacles in EU Border Regions. Case Study No. 12. Spatial Planning Obstacles to Cross-border Public Consultations (France—Belgium). 2017. Available online: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5394ba65-6b6e-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-117320425> (accessed on 10 March 2020).
121. Church, A.; Reid, P. Urban Power, International Networks and Competition: The Example of Cross-border Cooperation. *Urban Stud.* **1996**, *33*, 1297–1318. [CrossRef]

122. Medeiros, E. *Cross-Border Cooperation in EU Regional Policy: A Fair Deal?* Universidade de Lisboa: Lisboa, Portugal, 2009.
123. Medeiros, E.J.R. Old vs recent cross-border cooperation: Portugal-Spain and Norway-Sweden. *Area* **2010**, *42*, 434–443. [[CrossRef](#)]
124. De Sousa, L. Understanding European Cross-border Cooperation: A Framework for Analysis. *J. Eur. Integr.* **2013**, *35*, 669–687. [[CrossRef](#)]
125. Gorzelak, G.; Zawalińska, K. European Territories: From Cooperation to Integration? 2013. Available online: <http://www.euroreg.uw.edu.pl/en/publications,european-territories-from-cooperation-to-integration> (accessed on 5 March 2020).
126. Heidenreich, M. The renewal of regional capabilities. *Res. Policy* **2005**, *34*, 739–757. [[CrossRef](#)]
127. ARL. European in der Krise. *ARL Nachr.* **2014**, *44*, 5–10.
128. Gensheimer, M. Climate Change May Hamper Territorial Cohesion. 2012. Available online: <https://www.espon.eu/climate-2012> (accessed on 1 February 2020).



© 2020 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

5.3 Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions

Demeterova, Barbara (2023): Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions. In: *Regional Studies*, Special Issue on: EU Cohesion Policy towards Territorial cohesion? (Resubmitted. CRES-2022-0599.R1).

The third article was directed at the third research question. It was submitted in July 2022 to the Taylor and Francis Journal *Regional Studies* to the special issue on “EU Cohesion Policy towards territorial cohesion?” under the former title “Collective Action, Learning and Local Mobilisation for Sustainable Spatial Transitions through European Cohesion”.

After the review it was revised and resubmitted again in April 2023.

Author contributions: Conceptualisation, B.D.; methodology, B.D.; software B.D.; validation, B.D; formal analysis, B.D.; investigation, B.D.; resources, B.D.; writing—original draft preparation, B.D.; writing—review and editing, B.D.; visualization, B.D.; supervision B.D.; project administration, B.D.



Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions

Journal:	<i>Regional Studies</i>
Manuscript ID	CRES-2022-0599.R1
Manuscript Type:	Special Issue Paper
JEL codes:	R11 - Regional Economic Activity: Growth, Development, Environmental Issues, and Changes < R1 - General Regional Economics < R - Urban, Rural, Regional, Real Estate, and Transportation Economics
Keywords:	Spatial Justice; European Territorial Cohesion; Sustainable Transitions; Regional Capabilities; Relational Planning
Abstract:	Given the uneven distribution of regional benefits and losses across Europe, the article assesses the potential of stronger justice and capabilities-oriented approaches to development. Critically reflecting on dominant spatial narratives, the research builds on a qualitative content analysis of selected past and present policy frameworks for European cohesion, territorial and environmental action. Applying a framing analysis approach, the analysis demonstrates that the strategies frame sustainable territorial development strongly along competitiveness-targeting, distributive, and coordination-oriented categories. However, a relational, spatial justice and capacity building focus is on the rise. Concluding that shifting objectives from performance towards more learning-oriented goals bears the potential to stronger serve spatially just and sustainable regional dynamics, it argues for change of focus towards regional processes.

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cres> Email: cres-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Assessing regional capabilities-oriented approaches for European just and sustainable transitions

Abstract

Given the uneven distribution of regional benefits and losses across Europe, the article assesses the potential of stronger justice and capabilities-oriented approaches to development. Critically reflecting on dominant spatial narratives, the research builds on a qualitative content analysis of selected past and present policy frameworks for European cohesion, territorial and environmental action. Applying a framing analysis approach, the analysis demonstrates that the strategies frame sustainable territorial development strongly along competitiveness-targeting, distributive, and coordination-oriented categories. However, a relational, spatial justice and capacity building focus is on the rise. Concluding that shifting objectives from performance towards more learning-oriented goals bears the potential to stronger serve spatially just and sustainable regional dynamics, it argues for change of focus towards regional processes.

Keywords: Spatial Justice; European Territorial Cohesion; Sustainable Transitions; Regional Capabilities; Relational Planning

Introduction

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

What constitutes development changes over time and comes along with geographically differentiated definitions that vary within and between places (Pike et al., 2007). Early addressed by the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), the idea of sustainable development steadily shaped policy formulation as well as implementation strategies at various scales. Reflecting a process of taking social responsibility for long-term interdependencies between global-local human activities and nature it also pays attention to different and often unbalanced (spatial) power dynamics (Avelino, 2017; Breuer et al., 2019; Lele & Norgaard, 1996). With the turn of the millennium, European Union (EU) strategies started to frame development increasingly under sustainability-related aspects, however, simultaneously pushing for territorial competitiveness as a consequence of a global-local competition dynamics (EC, 2004; Nordregio et al., 2007; Voinescu & Moisoiu, 2015). Recently, this focus has been even more strengthened by aligning central investment policies, such as EU cohesion policy, towards green growth approaches through the European ‘Green Deal’ (CEC, 2019). Considering the uneven distribution of regional benefits and losses and the continuance of social, economic and environmental imbalances, scholars have put the desirability of regional growth-orientation repeatedly under question (Ossewaarde & Ossewaarde-Lowtoot, 2020; Sarracino, 2019). Characteristically, so-called ‘left behind places’ (Pike et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) became the figurehead of this debate in Europe. Symbolizing deprived places of manifold social-economic inequalities, some remain trapped in a downward spiral under present territorial policies. Assessing European cohesion policies actual consequences under the continuance of the neoliberal project, calls for more holistic, progressive and sustainable versions of local and regional development increased (Raco, 2012; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Scholars argued for greater sensitivity towards environmental and spatial justice following the understanding that fair development needs to address more than economic concerns, while also acknowledge the diversity of regional paths (Faburel, 2012; Fainstein, 2012; Panzera & Postiglione, 2022; Weck et al., 2022). Nonetheless, though sustainability’s continuous frictions with growth-oriented agendas are well documented (Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Roberts, 2003; Rosa & Henning, 2017; Sandler & Pezzullo, 2007), post-growth implications for European cohesive development have rarely been discussed (Rauhut & Humer, 2020). With continued regional polarisation, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, new lines of global conflict (Capello & Caragliu, 2021) and increasing regional climate change vulnerabilities (ESPON, 2013), European just, sustainable and balanced territorial development poses a particularly challenging task at present. Though European spatial policies have increasingly become concerned with the local scale, actor-centred, relational and capabilities-oriented perspectives to development are rarely addressed (Demeterova et al. 2020a; Bachtrögl et al., 2020; Crescenzi et al., 2019; Kurath et al., 2018).

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

However, as sustainability-oriented transitions require collective action for societal change processes (Welch & Yates, 2018) and European territorial cohesion is already perceived strongly along relational dimensions (Demeterova et al. 2020a), a shifting focus towards local capabilities and relational aspects seems a reasonable (Heidenreich, 2005). Taking these considerations, the article assesses the potential of stronger process, actors and capabilities-oriented perspectives for European spatial development. Therefore, it looks into the framing of what currently constitutes sustainable and balanced European development to analyse the dominant narratives shaping present territorial responses. A qualitative content analysis of strategic policy documents for cohesion, territorial action and sustainability transitions, from the past (2014-2020) and present (2021-2027) European funding period, is being carried out. Allowing to reduce complexity and serving as an interpretative lens, the document analysis thereby follows a framing analysis approach (Shmueli, 2008). It reflects on the underlying values for development and sustainability, guiding objectives, problematisation and identified solutions, the allocated responsibilities as well as on opportunities for feedback. Contributing to interdisciplinary discussions on European territorial cohesion, the article adds an important and rarely addressed perspective on the significance of underlying narratives for both, European cohesive and sustainable development strategies that shape local planning decisions for just and sustainable transitions.

The following argumentation firstly points out the challenges to territorial cohesion, spatial justice and sustainable development for European regions before referring to the strengths of stronger relational planning and learning-oriented approaches. After the material and methods are being introduced, the following chapter presents and discusses the results of the conducted framing analysis. Finally, showing that the overall framing logic addresses sustainable development as a mix between the management of resources, coordinative tasks for spatial justice and processes of taking informed, systemic action, the conclusion argues for a reframing of European territorial strategies towards greater capabilities, learning and process-orientation for sustainable transitions.

Literature Review

European green growth and the challenges to spatial justice and sustainability transitions

Considering the history of modern world economy, Wallerstein (1988) early on asks whether the prevailing approach to development can be seen as following a lodestar or illusion. He critically points towards the discrepancy of the often-proclaimed twin goals: striving for greater inner equality and at the same time for economic growth. This understanding implies catching-up with those performing the best, as does the present European territorial cohesion rationale (Demeterova et al., 2020b). However, since these are quite opposing objectives, they are not correlative and remain in contradiction ever since, especially under sustainable development goals (Managi, 2019).

Overall, spatial planning, after a phase of peacetime reconstruction in the post-war era, became increasingly oriented towards the proper allocation of resources based on rational and economic decision-making (Friedmann & Hudson, 1974). With ever increasing regional challenges from globalisation dynamics and an rising awareness towards environmental pressures, the Lisbon Strategy (CEC, 2001a) and the Gothenburg Strategy (CEC, 2001b) have steered the European spatial development discourse towards competitiveness and sustainability from the turn of the millennium on (Nordregio et al., 2007). Striving for "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" (CEC, 2001a, p. 1) European strategies were also eager to let "economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection [...] go hand in hand" (CEC, 2001b, p. 2). This perspective shaped an understanding that growth and sustainability can be balanced together if tied to appropriate policy measures and technical innovation. Adopting that rhetoric early, territorial cohesion policy joined as European cohesion's third pillar, alongside economic and social cohesion, with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (CEC, 2007). But, already the Green Paper on territorial cohesion concluded that the key challenge remains to "ensure a balanced and sustainable territorial development of the EU as whole, strengthening its economic competitiveness and capacity for growth while respecting the need to preserve its natural assets and ensuring social cohesion" (CEC, 2008, p. 6).

Despite the efforts of the EU's cohesion policy to promote balanced economic and social development across Europe, its focus on regional growth poles has not had the desired distributional effects intended (Bere et al., 2015; Luukkonen, 2010). Over the past decades, European strategies largely prioritized regional catching-up efforts, notwithstanding geographically uneven distribution patterns of benefits and losses (Demeterova et al. 2020b; Hacker, 2021; Sala-i-Martin, 1996; Tvrdon, 2012). Shifting from equity-oriented, donor-recipient models towards more growth-oriented policies, inter- and intra-regional imbalances of European regions were rather reinforced than mitigated (Hacker, 2021; Pike et al., 2007). Lingering

1
2
3 disparities, especially between national centre regions and their surrounding ‘lagging-behind’
4 regions, have been increasingly identified as posing a significant thread to the overall European
5 cohesion process and political stability (Capello & Caragliu, 2021; Iammarino et al., 2017;
6 Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Academic discussions also identify the steadily diverging economic and
7 social policy priorities, due to conflicting national interests and uneven territorial globalisation
8 effects, as significant risk to European territorial integration and sustainability transitions (Glawe
9 & Wagner, 2021). Further, with climate change effects gaining significance in regional
10 development, also the differences in regional climate vulnerabilities increasingly add to existing
11 cohesion challenges (ESPON, 2013).

12
13
14
15
16
17 Recently European strategies were reorganized towards ‘green growth’ objectives by
18 aligning central investment policies to the European Green Deal (CEC, 2019). Though growth
19 proponents argued for the positive effects of economic growth for regional prosperity ever since,
20 more critical scholars have increasingly pointed out that growth not necessarily leads towards
21 improved wellbeing, regional equity and sustainability (Jackson, 2011; Rauhut & Humer, 2020;
22 Rosa & Henning, 2017). With green growth being largely tied to an increase in national
23 production and consumption patterns, doubts regarding its contribution to sustainability
24 transitions were voiced (Hickel & Kallis, 2020; Schmid, 2019). Given that the, particularly
25 innovation driven, competitiveness of places remains the catchword for development under green
26 growth premises, scholars questioned the desirability of continuous economic growth for actual
27 local well-being and sustainable development (Ossewaarde & Ossewaarde-Lowtoot, 2020; Rosa
28 & Henning, 2017). Critics further argued against a continuance of a ‘politics of waiting’, calling
29 for alternative perspectives to development and sustainability that allow to truly target existing
30 inequalities (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006).

31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41 Sustainability transition approaches argue for holistic and integrated measures, pointing
42 towards the need for stronger collaborative and participatory processes to mitigate climate change
43 and creating more liveable, equitable, and resilient places (Hinrichs, 2014; Truffer & Coenen,
44 2012). Prominent alternative approaches to development increasingly started to shape debates on
45 the just development of places, allowing to reflect on underlying power imbalances, distributive
46 and participatory dynamics as well as the access to central resources (Alkire, 2005; Dikeç, 2001;
47 Fainstein, 2010; Kjell, 2011; Soja, 2010). The spatial justice approach in particular, as an
48 instrument for critical spatial thought, have been early used in the context of ‘right to’ movements,
49 calling for participation, individual liberties, social justice, articulation and the right to difference,
50 to meet the challenges of global commodification and capitalism dynamics (Harvey, 1976, 2003;
51 Lefebvre, 1967; Pirie, 1983; Soja, 2010). More recent discussions picked up these ideas and
52 addressed spatial justice in the context of European territorial cohesion (Jones et al., 2019;
53 Madanipour et al., 2022; Weck et al., 2022; Weckroth & Moisiso, 2020). These debates also
54 closely intersect with the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2013; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993).

1
2
3 Addressing the role of equity in development, capabilities are seen as the process of expanding
4 individual freedoms, where economic growth can be only one of many supporting factors (Sen,
5 1999). Especially for lesser developed regions, a focus on regional capabilities allows to reflect
6 on regional differences, target actors, networks and propose relational approaches to integrated
7 territorial development (Heidenreich, 2005). Connecting these ideas to the very idea of fairness,
8 equity, justice and well-being, the challenge, however, remains to date to define and agree upon
9 an general methodology for comparison of the largely qualitative, subjective and context-
10 dependent data (Sen, 2017).
11
12
13
14
15
16

17 *Relationality in spatial planning and the potential of learning-oriented goals*

18
19 The steadily shifting focus towards economic progress and regional competitiveness of
20 European cohesion policy went hand in hand with an increase in efforts towards stronger
21 evidence-based planning (Faludi & Waterhout, 2006). Especially the Barca-Report, a cohesion
22 policy reform for the period post-2013, coined the usage of common target, outcome and
23 performance indicators (Barca, 2009). Aiming for the greater effectiveness of cohesion funds, the
24 reform shifted the policy's focus on territorial matters away from the 'means' towards the 'ends'
25 of regional processes for greater comparability (Barca & McCann, 2011). Nonetheless, although
26 adding the European Observation Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPO,
27 2007) in the course of increased monitoring efforts, the difficulties in gaining comparable data
28 beyond economic indicators remain to this date. With concerns about the character of valid
29 evidence and overall cross-country comparability, the critique of macroeconomic indicators for
30 regional wellbeing grew (Davoudi, 2006; Krizek et al., 2009). Thedvall (2012) pointed towards
31 the political and cultural dimensions of European indicators. Based on their bureaucratic logic,
32 she argued, these indicators are largely being treated as representing an objective, politically
33 neutral reality. However, they rather result from a logic of cultural intimacy, "in which the
34 material that is made transparent is based upon what an EU member state wants to keep to itself
35 and not reveal to the entire EU" (Thedvall, 2012, p. 311). Further considering, that territorial
36 cohesion is perceived as a relational and place-based processual approach by the implementing
37 actors (Demeterova et al. 2020a), a mere outcome-orientation risks only insufficiently reflecting
38 the actual territorial dynamics. Recent planning theory, influenced by science and technology
39 studies and the actor-network theory, started to stronger acknowledge relationality as an empirical
40 phenomenon while investigating how specific sets of relations are inscribed into everyday
41 practices and instruments (Kurath et al., 2018). Reflecting on how relations are shaping the
42 qualities of places, aspects of collective and individual learning have been identified as important
43 components of social practice for complex change processes, collective action, policy
44 effectiveness and functioning organizational routines (Adams et al., 2014; Argyris, 1993).
45 However, according to essential organisational psychologies studies, the potential of learning is
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 heavily dependent on the respective goalsetting (Dweck, 1986; Elliott & Dweck, 1988; Grant &
4 Dweck, 2003). Focusing on winning positive judgments regarding individual competences, so-
5 called performance goals actually hinder learning through adopting strategies that aim to avoid
6 potential errors (Dweck, 1999). In contrast, learning goals accept failure as part of the learning
7 process, focussing rather on individual competences, the understanding of new things and the
8 development of new skillsets, thereby expanding individual capabilities and resilience strategies
9 while taking a solutions-oriented focus. In short, while performance goals are measuring the
10 ability to perform, learning goals are about the process of mastering new things.

11
12
13
14
15
16 These considerations seem worthwhile noticing in reflections on regional development
17 strategies that are closely tied to intrapersonal, organisational, and relational dynamics. With
18 lingering spatial disparities and places ‘lagging’ behind, regional success and failure risks also be
19 shaped by present European territorial goalsetting towards performance and quantifiable evidence
20 (Demeterova et al. 2020b). Though related concepts, such as the ‘learning regions’ approach,
21 were applied in European territorial development, their application rendered hardly successful
22 (Rutten & Boekema, 2012). Being too focussed on regional innovation and conceptionally too
23 ambiguous, they failed to develop into a widely used concept. Therefore, relationality in planning
24 needs to involve a broadened perspective on processes and the heterogeneity of entities connected
25 through collective action, agency, and interaction, while allowing for a diversity of regional paths.
26
27
28
29
30
31

32 33 **Material and Methods**

34
35 The analysis builds on a qualitative document analysis (Silverman, 2006) of selected
36 European policy documents. Choosing the framing analysis approach as a conceptual and analytic
37 tool, the study follows Schmueli’s understanding of framing as an interpretative lens, allowing to
38 reduce complexity, filter perceptions and define fields of vision on relevant considerations in the
39 decision making process (Druckman, 2004; Shmueli, 2008). Applying five framing categories,
40 see Table 1, together with related sub-categories, the article follows the framing of European
41 cohesion, territorial and sustainable action.
42
43
44
45

46 The chosen frames thereby allow to reflect on (i) the understanding and identification of
47 the underlying values for development and sustainability; (ii) the phrasing of the chosen
48 development objectives; (iii) the substance guiding the outcomes together with the
49 problematisation and focus setting; (iv) the overall development process as understood through
50 the frameworks and actors involved; and (v) the characterisation of the targeted progress.
51
52
53
54

55 *Table 1 - Framing categories selected for content analysis (own illustration).*

56 Framing	(i) Identity and Value (understanding)	57 The documents selected for analysis 58 (Table 2) comprise central European 59 cohesion policy regulations, territorial 60 strategies and framework documents
56 Categories	(ii) Phrasing (goalsetting)	
	(iii) Substance (problematisation)	
	(iv) Process (solutions and actions)	
	(v) Characterisation (progress)	

for sustainable development. In order to demonstrate the framing process over time, the article chose to look at past and present regulations and framework documents for European development, comparing documents from the previous (2014-2020) to those for the present funding period (2021-2027).

Table 2 – Analysed documents (own illustration).

Documents Analysed	Cohesion Policy Programme Period	
	2014 – 2020	2021 - 2027
European Cohesion and Shared Management Funds Regulations	Common provisions regulation (1303/2013) (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF))	Common provisions regulation (2021/1060) (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), the Cohesion Fund (CF), the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Internal Security Fund (ISF) and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy (IBMF))
Territorial Frameworks	Territorial Agenda 2020 (2011)	Territorial Agenda 2030 (2020)
Environmental Frameworks	Environmental Action Programme 2020 (2013)	Environmental Action Programme 2030 (2020) (proposal)

This selection was made under the aspects of feasibility, representativity and significance, choosing policy regulations that guide past and present discussions on the process of sustainable and cohesive European territorial development. The document analysis has been carried out using the software MAXQDA. The coding structure resulted from an iterative process, combining an inductive and deductive approach to code development and sustainability objectives in combination with the framing categories. In total 18 main codes, plus additional sub-codes, have been identified for the following analysis (Table 3).

Table 3 – Framing analysis categories and coding structure (own illustration).

Framing Categories	Coding Structure (with sub-codes)				
(i) Identity and Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – spatial justice and capabilities – balance and solidarity – growth/ competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – knowledge building – economic, environmental, social sustainability – reference to framework documents 			
(ii) Phrasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy coherence and effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth, competitiveness and infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – innovation – mobility and connectivity – energy security and efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – protection, mitigation, environmental integration, – green/just transition and adaptation – preservation of natural and cultural heritage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing, social inclusion, participation and governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – demographic challenges and social inclusion – wellbeing and quality of life – knowledge building, training, participation – government/ governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated territorial development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reduction of disparities – diversity of places – dev. of urban areas – dev. of rural areas – maritime dev. – closer to citizens/CLLD
(iii) Substance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on selected topics for development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – climate change and environmental justice – social inequalities – digitalisation – policy effectiveness, coordination and coherence – EU integration – demography – economic, social and territorial disparities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis capacity building and learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – networks, knowledge transfer and training – feedback and correction mechanisms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on territorial performance and outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – territorial performance and economic development – financial management – spending and allocation of funds 		
(iv) Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness (development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency (spending) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multilevel governance & synergies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity building and collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement, mobilisation and local action
(v) Characterisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring, evaluation and feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation and durability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public visibility 		

The framing categories were further analysed using the MAXmaps Single-Case Model visualisation tool, displaying the most frequent codes according to their occurrence in the coded segments.

The Framing of European Cohesion, Territorial Action and Sustainable Transitions

European Common Provision Regulation

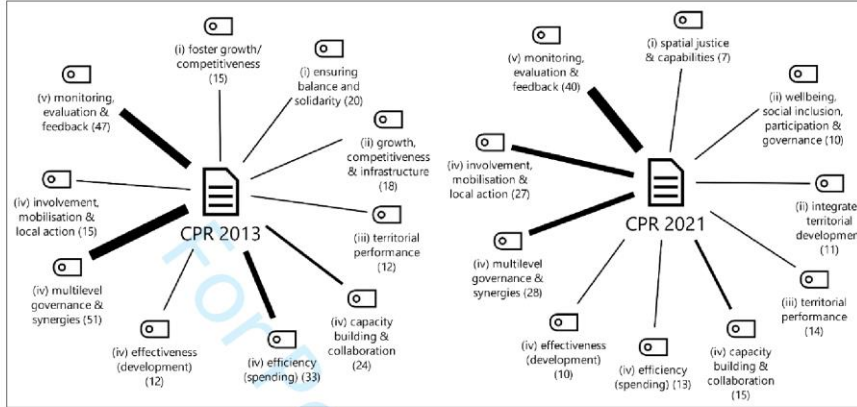


Figure 1 - Visualisation of the CPR 2013 and CPR 2021 analysis. Showing the most frequent codes per document with respect to the five framing categories and their code frequency, also displayed by the linewidth (MAXmaps visualisation, own modification).

Looking at the past and present CPR documents (Figure 1) as the Common Strategic Framework guiding the foci setting for cohesive development across European territories, it becomes apparent that though keeping an overall focus towards a balanced and competitive development, the emphasis slightly shifts towards a greater justice and wellbeing orientation. Considering the first frame, the (i) understanding of development and sustainability, the documents combine a perspective towards development that addresses aspects of distributive justice, through social, economic and territorial investments. Stating that the Union and member states shall “implement the delivery of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, while promoting harmonious development of the Union” (CEC, 2013b, p. 320) the CPR 2013 targets a balance between the levels of development. Similar framing can be observed in the CPR 2021 (CEC, 2021), striving to reduce regional disparities while ensuring a balanced development and implementation. By adding the Just Transition Fund (JTF), as a new policy instrument for the 2021-2027 funding period in the context of the European Green Deal (CEC, 2019), an increased orientation towards climate neutrality transitions together with a territorial justice component shows.

Addressing growth and regional competitiveness through performance-oriented strategies throughout the documents, the second frame, concerned with the (ii) goalsetting and main focus, however, also displays a shifting focus towards stronger wellbeing, inclusion, participation, good governance and an integrated territorial development orientation. Both CPR documents overlap in their thematic focus on economic competitiveness, innovation, energy

1
2
3 transitions, climate change mitigation and adaption, transport, infrastructure and social inclusion,
4 but the focus shifts observably towards more social, environmental matters and an integrated
5 territorial development. Previously setting the focus towards research, education, training, life-
6 long learning, enhancement of governance and administration as well as environmental protection
7 (CEC, 2013b), the CPR 2021 narrows the eleven, to five thematic objectives and adds the rather
8 unspecific aim for a “Europe closer to citizens”, fostering sustainable and integrated development
9 of territories and local initiatives (CEC, 2021).
10
11
12
13

14 When it comes the *(iii) problematisation and fields of action*, both CPR documents see a
15 major challenge in the continuance of territorial disparities and therefore identify increased
16 territorial performance as desired element of change. The CPR 2013 pays particular attention to
17 rural and deindustrialised areas as well as areas with ‘natural’ or ‘demographic’ handicaps.
18 Continuing this rhetoric, the CPR 2021 states that additional funding aims to offset lingering
19 structural social and economic disparities to counteract regional imbalances (CEC, 2020b).
20
21
22
23

24 The *(iv) mobilisation and solution approaches* then show that both CPR documents
25 continue to propose a strongly financial management driven perspective linking the effective
26 implementation of ESI Funds to economic and financial governance. While both see the relevance
27 in capacity building and collaboration, the funding efficiency and effectiveness, multilevel
28 governance and in the consideration of synergies, the focus towards involvement, mobilisation
29 and local action intensifies in the present funding period. Striving to ensure “an appropriate
30 balance between the effective and efficient implementation of the Funds and the related
31 administrative costs and burdens (CEC, 2021, p. 168), both documents aim for sound financial
32 management of resources, making sure that “the budget of the Union is not used in a wasteful or
33 inefficient way” (CEC, 2013b, p. 323). To reflect the level of development and need for support,
34 the GDP per capita serves as main indicator for resource allocation among the ‘less developed’,
35 the ‘transition’ and the ‘more developed’ regions across Europe.
36
37
38
39
40
41
42

43 When it comes to the *(v) characterisation of progress*, a strong focus towards monitoring
44 and evaluation as feedback mechanisms dominates both CPR documents. Sharing a clear target
45 orientation for territorial spending, aiming also for the highest possible allocation of funds, the
46 past and present CPR support the formulation of performance goals through the implementation
47 of a ‘Performance Framework’. The framework, individually established by the member states,
48 should cover “all indicators, milestones and targets to monitor [and] report on and evaluate
49 programme performance” with regard to the ESI funds (CEC, 2021, p. 163).
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

European Territorial Agenda

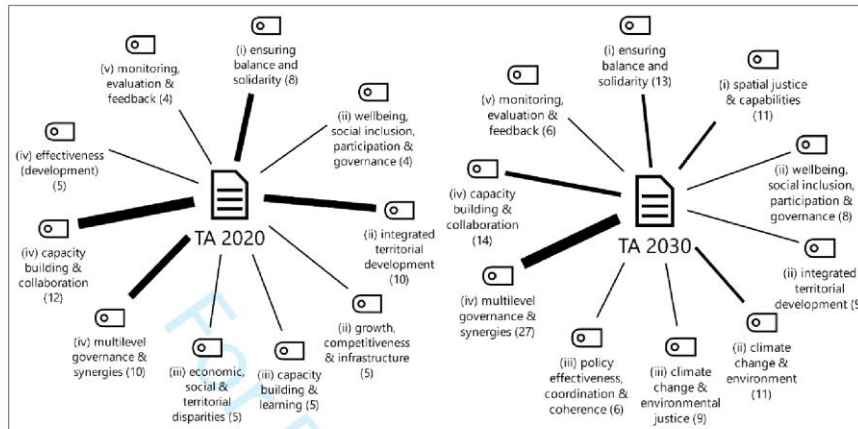


Figure 2 – Visualisation of the TA 2020 and TA 2030 analysis. Showing the most frequent codes per document with respect to the five framing categories and their code frequency, also displayed by the linewidth (MAXmaps visualisation, own modification).

The European Territorial Agenda (TA), a framework document for strategic spatial planning with strong linkage to EU cohesion policy, takes a similar perspective to the CPR towards the *(i) understanding of development and sustainability*. Both, the former and present TA target a balanced territorial development. With the TA 2030 then also aiming stronger for spatial justice-oriented aspects, such as the ‘quality of life’. While the TA 2020 (CEC, 2011), an only eleven page short framework, is particularly promoting convergence, the TA 2030, already thirty pages strong, pays stronger attention towards territorial inequalities, capabilities and spatial justice. Indenting to “reduc[e] inequalities between people and between places” (CEC, 2020b, p. 15) it follows the objective that “all public policies should be to increase citizens’ well-being and quality of life” beyond economic performance, living standards and material aspects, while including access to quality public services, freedom of movement and healthy, resilient environments. Thereby, transition shall ensure that “progress towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaves no one and no place behind, and delivers a high quality of life for all.” (ibid., p. 11) in particular.

The *(ii) goalsetting and main focus* of the TA slightly shifts from a growth, competitiveness and infrastructure orientation towards more climate change-oriented concerns. The TA 2020 (CEC, 2011) promotes objectives towards polycentric, integrated regional and transregional development, global and local competitiveness, improved territorial connectivity and the focus on ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions. However, the present TA 2023 (CEC, 2020b) stronger targets a justice and sustainability-oriented goalsetting. It strives towards a just and a green Europe as its two overarching principles, addressing six sub-priorities

1
2
3 dealing with balanced development, convergence and functional regions, cross-border
4 integration, societal and environmental transition as well as an increased connectivity of places.
5 The goalsetting of both agendas is strongly dominated through the frame of territorial integration,
6 highlighting regional interdependencies and the need for “continued networking, cooperation and
7 integration between various regions of the EU at all relevant territorial levels” (CEC, 2011, p. 3).
8
9

10
11 Considering the expressed *(iii) problematisation and fields of action*, the documents
12 further focus on the EU integration process, challenged by factors such as “regions divided by
13 administrative borders, and differences in fiscal discipline and commitment between Member
14 States” (CEC, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, topics such as capacity building and learning, economic,
15 social and territorial disparities are being addressed by the TA 2020 in particular, being then
16 stronger aligned to climate change and environmental justice concerns, policy effectiveness,
17 coordination and coherence matters in the TA 2030. Pointing out the interdependencies between
18 places, positive and negative externalities are being problematised, with core-periphery divisions
19 resulting in underutilised human, cultural, economic and ecological resources. Overall, both
20 documents focus on the growing interdependencies of regions and the need for a better
21 coordination as well as increased cooperation to tackle mutual challenges.
22
23

24
25 The *(iv) mobilisation and solution* framing follows a coordinative approach, as the TA
26 documents identify multilevel governance, the use of synergies, capacity building and
27 collaboration as central elements. Thus “[m]ulti-level governance formats are required to manage
28 different functional territories and to ensure balanced and coordinated contribution of local,
29 regional, national and European actors in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity” (CEC,
30 2013b, p. 8). Furthermore, this needs the “vertical and horizontal coordination between
31 decision-making bodies at different levels and sector-related policies to secure consistency and
32 synergy” (ibid.). For this purpose, the EU and other authorities, national, sector, regional and
33 municipal policies, as well as various society groups need to come together.
34
35

36
37 The *(v) characterisation of progress* is reflected in both TA’s through proposing
38 integrated territorial impact assessments, based on stakeholder inputs that allow for regular
39 monitoring, evaluation and feedback. These shall strengthen the territorial dimension, taking
40 territorial matters into account through input from regional and local authorities (CEC, 2011,
41 p. 9). For this purpose, strong methodological support and comprehensive territorial knowledge,
42 provided by ESPON, informs the EU level policy-making process. In particular, actual territorial
43 impacts and the territorial coordination of policies shall be considered, while the overall progress
44 of the TA 2030 has to be further discussed amongst relevant stakeholders to “strengthen dialogue
45 on the interplay between territorial development and sector policies” (CEC, 2020b, p. 23).
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

European Environmental Action Plan

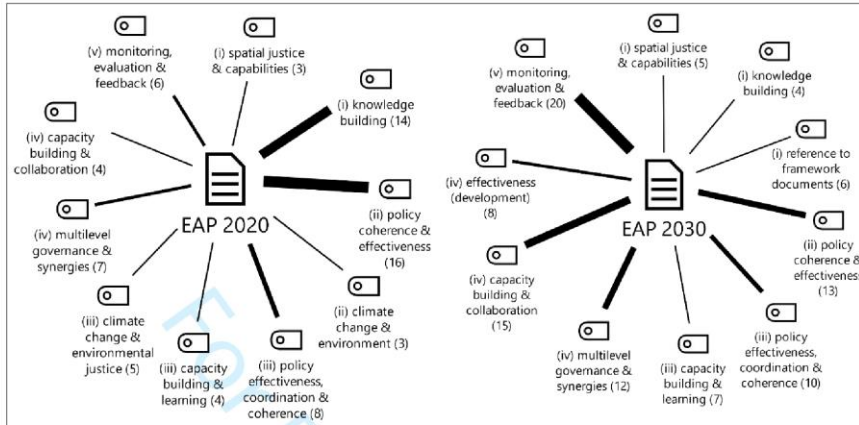


Figure 3 – Visualisation of the EAP 2020 and EAP 2030 analysis. Showing the most frequent codes per document with respect to the five framing categories and their code frequency, also displayed by the linewidth (MAXmaps visualisation, own modification).

In greater contrast to the previously introduced documents, the Environmental Action Program (EAP) set a notably clearer focus on long-term action and knowledge building alongside a sustainable development, that ensures to live well ‘within the limits of our planet’ (CEC, 2013a). The (i) understanding of development and sustainability of both the EAP 2020 and the EAP 2030 grounds on former assessments and framework documents, aiming to draw on a “sound knowledge base [that] ensure[s] that the evidence underpinning policy-making [...] can be better understood at all levels” (CEC, 2013a, p. 173). Presenting itself as a tool for environmental policy continuity through long-term vision, especially the EAP 2030 targets policy accountability and predictability for environmental actions (CEC, 2020a, p. 2). Overall, both documents follow a strong knowledge and capacity building perspective towards sustainable development.

Looking at the (ii) goalsetting and main focus, the documents follow a clear long-term vision for their implementation, namely till 2050. Both documents address policy coherence, policy effectiveness as well as climate change and environment-oriented goals. Proposing seven priority objectives, the EAP 2020 (CEC, 2013a) strives towards protection and conservation of natural capital, resource efficiency and low-carbon economies, the safeguarding of health and well-being from environmental-related risk, but also towards improved legislation and implementation, knowledge and evidence-based policy frameworks. Further it aims to secure climate-related investments, improved environmental integration, policy coherence, urban sustainability as well as the EU’s effectiveness in addressing environmental and climate-related challenges. In line with the European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the EAP 2030 also targets the acceleration of EU’s transition towards “a climate-neutral, resource-efficient clean and circular economy in a just and inclusive way” (CEC, 2020b, p. 3).

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

When it comes to the *(iii) problematisation and fields of action*, the documents address the prevailing knowledge gaps and call for investments in further data collection and to ensure a sound basis for decision taking, that “fully reflect true social, economic and environmental benefits and costs.” (CEC, 2013a, p. 191). Referring to environmental problems and impacts, posing risks for human health and well-being, the EAP 2020 (CEC, 2013a) identifies knowledge and action deficits that hamper the development process. Especially the insufficient implementation of environmental legislations is resulting in inefficient, poorly managed and unsustainable use of resources and negative environmental impacts (*ibid.*, p. 176). Intensified by global systemic trends and challenges as well as unsustainable economic growth, the complexity of tackling environmental challenges and achieving long-term sustainable development is being highlighted, stating the need for further climate action to ensure the EU’s long-term prosperity. The present EAP 2030 document calls for the need to ensure “a sound, accessible and transparent knowledge and evidence base” supporting the implementation of the strategic priorities and strengthening knowledge for sustainable European transitions (CEC, 2020b, p. 7).

As *(iv) mobilisation and solution approach*, both documents stress out the importance of sound governance structures with strong focus on multilevel governance, synergies, capacity building and collaboration, adding an increased focus towards policy effectiveness. The EAP 2030 then highlights the importance of effective application where “environmental policies and action are based on the best available scientific knowledge” while ensuring “high standards of transparency, public participation and access to justice” (CEC, 2020a, p. 12). Striving to make data and evidence publicly available and easily accessible it allows for stronger capacity building in environmental matters. Also supporting ownership and local action, the proposed horizontal measures aim to benefit EU’s policy beyond the scope and timeframes of the documents. Through mainstreaming sustainability in all relevant initiatives and projects at national and EU level, both EAP’s propose systemic solutions that allow for long-term transitions.

The *(v) characterisation of progress* increasingly shifts towards monitoring, evaluation and feedback-oriented measures in the documents. In the context of progressing towards a transition for greater sustainability, wellbeing and resilience, the EAP documents point out the need for measuring economic performance and societal progress “beyond GDP” while using wellbeing as a policy compass (CEC, 2020a, p. 4). Furthermore, to increase the Union’s impact of addressing climate-related and environmental challenges, adequate investments should support the proposed EAP objectives (CEC, 2013a). The overall progress of measures, actions and targets should be taken forward by smart regulation and comprehensive impact assessments. However, the EAP 2020 already points out that full commitment of the member states and the relevant Union institutions must be ensured as well as the “willingness to take responsibility for the delivery of the programme’s intended benefits” (*ibid.*, p. 171). Repeating this argument, the EAP 2030 highlights that “environment and climate policy is an area of shared competence in the EU

1
2
3 and a decentralised policy” (CEC, 2020a, p. 2), and strives to increase the coherence and
4 synergies between actions across all levels of governance while proposing to measure progress in
5 an integrated way. With an overall focus on enabling conditions and ownership, both EAP
6 documents share a strong process-component that is directed at collective action, capacity and
7 knowledge building.
8
9

10
11
12 ***From managing resources to spatial justice-oriented processes of taking informed***
13 ***action***
14

15
16 Overall all documents clearly reflect the priorities set in the European Lisbon Strategy
17 (CEC, 2001a) and the Gothenburg Strategy (CEC, 2001b) towards territorial competitiveness and
18 sustainability, while also targeting the proper allocation of resources based on rational and
19 economic decision-making (Friedmann & Hudson, 1974). Reflecting on the framing categories
20 chosen for analysis, the first frame (i) points towards an understanding of development values
21 along categories that target distributive balance, spatial justice but also more systemic, capacity
22 and learning oriented transitions. This understanding further guides the (ii) goalsetting and
23 prioritisation of the documents, revealing a focus towards growth and competitiveness, territorial
24 integration as well as coherence and synergies. Though addressing multiple fields for action, the
25 general (iii) problematisation is being strongly framed through the lenses of territorial disparities,
26 insufficient cooperation and coordination as well as deficient knowledge and inaction.
27 Considering the overall framing for (iv) mobilisation and solution approaches, matching the
28 proclaimed fields of action, the rhetoric is structured along aims for financial management, use
29 of synergies and multi-level-governance as well as knowledge and capacity building. Finally, the
30 (v) characterisation of progress is driven by an intensifying monitoring, evaluation and feedback
31 processes, but under different focus settings. Considering the change in the priority settings of the
32 documents, a shifting policy focus towards justice and relational aspects becomes apparent.
33 However, the present understanding towards spatial justice still seems to follow the misleading
34 belief, that (green) growth and sustainability can be balanced together if tied to appropriate policy
35 measures. Thereby, the present approaches risk a continuance of a ‘politics of waiting’ if not
36 considering alternative perspectives to sustainable development (Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006).
37 The capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2013) in particular allows to address the actual role of
38 equity in development, pointing out not only the already in the documents present vertical
39 (participation oriented) aspects of just development, but also the horizontal (access oriented)
40 aspects, largely absent in present strategies (Davies, 2014; Dikeç, 2001; Nussbaum, 2013).
41 Allowing to stronger reflect on regional differences, actors, networks and relational aspects
42 (Heidenreich, 2005) it also supports relational planning approaches for complex change processes
43 and integrated territorial development (Adams et al., 2014; Argyris, 1993). Thereby, also a clearer
44 emphasis on learning goals can support the already increased focus towards regional capacity
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 building and collaboration and allow for the development of new skillsets and approaches while
4 expanding regional capabilities and resilience strategies (Grant & Dweck, 2003).
5
6

7 8 **Conclusion**

9
10 Applying the framing analysis approach (Shmueli, 2008) on past and present European
11 cohesion, territorial and environmental strategies, the analysis reflects on the underlying values
12 for development and sustainability, guiding objectives, problematisation and identified solutions,
13 the allocated responsibilities as well as on opportunities for feedback. Taking into account the
14 policy documents purpose and multidimensional understanding of development, the overlying
15 framing tendencies are worthwhile noticing. Overall, the five framing categories display a
16 framing logic that addresses sustainable development as a mix between the management of
17 resources, coordinative tasks for spatial justice and processes of taking informed, systemic action.
18 Especially the EAP stands in greater contrast to the CPR and the TA documents, targeting
19 capacity, learning and knowledge building measures for sustainability transitions in particular.
20 Though aspects of spatial justice, capabilities, wellbeing, learning and mobilisation-oriented
21 approaches gain relevance, the focus still rarely considers a formulation of more explicit,
22 learning-oriented goals. At the same time, an increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation
23 rather points towards a result orientation that continues to turn a blind eye to political and cultural
24 dimensions of seemingly objective European indicators (Thedvall, 2012).
25
26

27
28 Considering the ongoing dominant orientation towards territorial performance, European
29 strategies run danger to reduce social, environmental and territorial challenges to easy-to-address,
30 measurable and technical questions, only inadequately responding to actual regional challenges.
31 Though European spatial policies have increasingly become concerned with the local scale, actor-
32 centred, relational and capabilities-oriented perspectives to development are rarely targeted
33 (Bachtrögler et al., 2020). Pointing out the dominant discourses in the framing of development
34 practices, the present article identifies stronger learning and capabilities-oriented approaches as
35 potential missing link to sustainable and just European transitions. Though related concepts were
36 applied in European territorial development, their application did not succeed yet (Rutten &
37 Boekema, 2012). Arguing for greater awareness towards relationality in planning, this also needs
38 to involve a broadened perspective on the process of collective action, learning, agency and
39 interaction, while allowing for a diversity of regional paths (Kurath et al., 2018). A clearer
40 emphasis on learning goals would further support the already increased focus towards spatial
41 justice, capacity building and collaboration, allowing for the development of new skillsets and
42 reducing the pressure on the ability to perform or catch-up (Grant & Dweck, 2003). Learning
43 goals could therefore stronger support process-oriented transition measures and better reflect
44 capability-oriented approaches to development (Nussbaum, 2013).
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

However, the challenge to define and agree upon a general methodology for comparison remains and calls for more context specific future assessments. Considering the need for a better interlinking of European, regional and local planning instruments, more explicit learning and capabilities-oriented goalsetting could also assist an actual, integrated policy re-scaling, as proposed by recent scholars (Mendez et al., 2021). Acknowledging the limitations of the analysis, the need for further empirical research and the development of applicable planning instruments is highlighted at this point. However, to support a long-term spatial transition process, which is open-ended, regional policy must reintroduce an emphasis on the ‘means’, understood as the process components of development, for context sensitive, sustainable, and spatially just responses. Thereby, as Wallerstein (1988) reminds us, the development discrepancy between the aim for inner equity on the one hand and progressive development on the other can potentially be overcome, targeting a development process that leaves no one behind.

References

- 1
2
3
4
5 Adams, N., Cotella, G., & Nunes, R. (2014). The Engagement of Territorial Knowledge
6 Communities with European Spatial Planning and the Territorial Cohesion Debate: A Baltic
7 Perspective. *European Planning Studies*, 22(4), 712–734.
8 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.772735>
9
10
11 Alkire, S. (2005). Why the Capability Approach? *Journal of Human Development*, 6(1), 115–
12 135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/146498805200034275>
13
14 Argyris, C. (1993). *Knowledge for action: A guide to overcoming barriers to organizational*
15 *change* (1st ed.). *The Jossey-Bass social and behavioral science series*. Jossey-Bass.
16
17
18 Avelino, F. (2017). Power in Sustainability Transitions: Analysing power and
19 (dis)empowerment in transformative change towards sustainability. *Environmental Policy*
20 *and Governance*, 27(6), 505–520. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.1777>
21
22
23 Bachtrögl, J., Fratesi, U., & Perucca, G. (2020). The influence of the local context on the
24 implementation and impact of EU Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies*, 54(1), 21–34.
25 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2018.1551615>
26
27
28 Barca, F. (2009). *An agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy: A place-based approach to*
29 *meeting European Union challenges and expectations*.
30
31
32 Barca, F., & McCann, P. (2011). *Outcome Indicators and Targets: Towards a Performance*
33 *Oriented EU Cohesion Policy*.
34 https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/performance_en.htm
35
36
37 Bere, R. C., Precup, I. B., & Silvestru, C. I. (2015). On Growth Poles from EU Countries in the
38 Framework of Europe 2020. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 23, 920–925.
39 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00519-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00519-5)
40
41
42 Breuer, A., Janetschek, H., & Malerba, D. (2019). Translating Sustainable Development Goal
43 (SDG) Interdependencies into Policy Advice. *Sustainability*, 11(7), 2092.
44 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11072092>
45
46
47 Capello, R., & Caragliu, A. (2021). Regional growth and disparities in a post-COVID Europe:
48 A new normality scenario. *Journal of Regional Science*, 61(4), 710–727.
49 <https://doi.org/10.1111/jors.12542>
50
51
52 CEC. (2001a). *The Lisbon Strategy*.
53 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empl/dv/lisbonstrategybn_](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empl/dv/lisbonstrategybn_/lisbonstrategybn_en.pdf)
54 [/lisbonstrategybn_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/empl/dv/lisbonstrategybn_/lisbonstrategybn_en.pdf)
55
56
57 CEC. (2001b). *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for*
58 *Sustainable Development: Communication from the Commission. Commission's proposal to*
59
60

- 1
2
3 the Gothenburg European Council. COM/2001/0264 final. [https://eur-](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52001DC0264:EN:HTML)
4 lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52001DC0264:EN:HTML
5
6
7 CEC. (2007). *Treaty of Lisbon*. Commission of the European Communities. [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT)
8 lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT
9
10 CEC. (2008). *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament,*
11 *the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee: Green*
12 *Paper on Territorial Cohesion, turning territorial diversity into strength (COM(2008) 616*
13 *final)*. Brussels.
14
15
16 CEC. (2011). *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards an Inclusive, Smart*
17 *and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions*. Gödöllő.
18
19
20 CEC. (2013a). *General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 - Living well, within the*
21 *limits of our planet: Decision No 1386/2013 EU of the European Parliament and of the*
22 *Council of 20 November 2013*. Brussels.
23
24
25 CEC (Ed.). *Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of*
26 *17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development*
27 *Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for*
28 *Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down*
29 *general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social*
30 *Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing*
31 *Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006*. 1303/2013.
32
33
34
35
36 CEC. (2019). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European*
37 *Commission, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the*
38 *Committee of the Regions: The European Green Deal*. COM(2019) 640 final. Brussels.
39
40
41 CEC. (2020a). *Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a*
42 *general Union Environment Action Programme to 2030: COM(2020) 652 final*. CEC.
43 [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/document/download/4b2e129d-2d20-4738-965b-](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/document/download/4b2e129d-2d20-4738-965b-7bcfc1a97d71_de)
44 7bcfc1a97d71_de
45
46
47
48 CEC. (2020b). *Territorial Agenda 2030: A future for all places*.
49 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/territorial_agenda_2030_en.](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/territorial_agenda_2030_en.pdf)
50 pdf
51
52
53 CEC. (2021). *Common provision on the European Regional Development Fund, the European*
54 *Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime,*
55 *Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration*
56 *and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support*
57 *for Border Management and Visa Policy: Regulation EU No 2021/1060*. Brussels.
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Crescenzi, R., Di Cataldo, M., & Giua, M. (2019). It's not about the money! EU Funds, local
4 opportunities, and the Brexit vote. *LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion Paper Series*
5 *(LEQS)*(149/2019).
6
7
8 Davies, R. (2014). *Measuring well-being and progress: Looking beyond GDP*. EPRS.
9 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140738REVI-Measuring-well-being-and-progress-](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140738REVI-Measuring-well-being-and-progress-FINAL.pdf)
10 [FINAL.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140738REVI-Measuring-well-being-and-progress-FINAL.pdf)
11
12 Davoudi, S. (2006). Evidence-Based Planning. *DisP - the Planning Review*, 42(165), 14–24.
13 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2006.10556951>
14
15 Demeterova, B., Fischer, T., & Schmude, J. (2020b). The Right to Not Catch Up—
16 Transitioning European Territorial Cohesion towards Spatial Justice for Sustainability.
17 *Sustainability*, 12(11), 4797. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114797>
18
19 Demeterova, B., Goodwin-Hawkins, B., & Fischer, T. (2020a). Conceptualisations of Territorial
20 Cohesion in Central European border regions. *European Planning Studies*, 29(45), 1–20.
21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2020.1716692>
22
23 Dikeç, M. (2001). Justice and the Spatial Imagination. *Environment and Planning a: Economy*
24 *and Space*, 33(10), 1785–1805. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a3467>
25
26 Druckman, J. (2004). Political Preference Formation: Competition, Deliberation, and the
27 (Ir)relevance of Framing Effects. *American Political Science Review*, 98(4), 671–686.
28 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404041413>
29
30 Dweck, C. S. (1986). Motivational processes affecting learning. *American Psychologist*, 41(10),
31 1040–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.41.10.1040>
32
33 Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development /*
34 *Carol S. Dweck. Essays in social psychology*. Psychology Press.
35
36 EC. (2004). *Third report on economic and social cohesion: A new partnership for cohesion -*
37 *convergence competitiveness cooperation*. Luxembourg.
38
39 Elliott, E. S., & Dweck, C. S. (1988). Goals: An approach to motivation and achievement.
40 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(1), 5–12. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.1.5)
41 [3514.54.1.5](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.1.5)
42
43 ESPON. (2007). *ESPON 2013 Programme: European observation network on territorial*
44 *development and cohesion*. ESPON. [https://www.espon.eu/programme/espon/espon-2013-](https://www.espon.eu/programme/espon/espon-2013-programme)
45 [programme](https://www.espon.eu/programme/espon/espon-2013-programme)
46
47 ESPON. (2013). *Climate change may hamper territorial cohesion*. Climate change and
48 Europe's regions. ESPON. <https://www.espon.eu/climate-2012>
49
50 Faburel, G. (2012). The Environment as a Factor of Spatial Injustice: A New Challenge for the
51 Sustainable Development of European Regions? In C. Ghenai (Ed.), *Sustainable*
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 *Development: Policy and Urban Development - Tourism, Life Science, Management and*
4 *Environment* (Vol. 1772). IntechOpen.
5
6
7 Fainstein, S. S. (2010). *The just city*. Cornell University Press.
8
9 Fainstein, S. S. (2012). Spatial Justice and Planning. In S. S. Fainstein & S. Campbell (Eds.),
10 *Studies in urban and social change. Readings in planning theory* (Vol. 26, pp. 258–272).
11 Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119084679.ch13>
12
13 Faludi, A., & Waterhout, B. (2006). Introducing Evidence-Based Planning. *DisP - the Planning*
14 *Review*, 42(165), 4–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02513625.2006.10556950>
15
16
17 Friedmann, J., & Hudson, B. (1974). Knowledge and Action: A Guide to Planning Theory.
18 *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 40(1), 2–16.
19 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944367408977442>
20
21
22 Glawe, L., & Wagner, H. (2021). Divergence Tendencies in the European Integration Process:
23 A Danger for the Sustainability of the E(M)U? *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*,
24 14(3), 104. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm14030104>
25
26
27 Grant, H., & Dweck, C. S. (2003). Clarifying achievement goals and their impact. *Journal of*
28 *Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(3), 541–553. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.3.541)
29 3514.85.3.541
30
31
32 Hacker, B. (2021). *Unequal Europe: Tackling Regional Disparities in the EU*. FES Nordic
33 Countries. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190494254.001.0001>
34
35
36 Harvey, D. (1976). *Social Justice and the City*. Edward Arnold.
37
38 Harvey, D. (2003). The right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional*
39 *Research*, 27(4), 939–941. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0309-1317.2003.00492.x>
40
41 Heidenreich, M. (2005). The renewal of regional capabilities. *Research Policy*, 34(5), 739–757.
42 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2005.04.004>
43
44 Hickel, J., & Kallis, G. (2020). Is Green Growth Possible? *New Political Economy*, 25(4), 469–
45 486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2019.1598964>
46
47 Hinrichs, C. C. (2014). Transitions to sustainability: a change in thinking about food systems
48 change? *Agriculture and Human Values*, 31(1), 143–155. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-014-9479-5)
49 014-9479-5
50
51
52 Iammarino, S., Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Storper, M. (2017). *Why regional development matters*
53 *for Europe's economic future*. Luxembourg. Regional and Urban Policy.
54 [https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/work/201707_regional_development_](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/work/201707_regional_development_matters.pdf)
55 matters.pdf
56
57
58 Jackson, T. (2011). *Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet / Tim Jackson*
59 (Pbk. ed.). Earthscan.
60

- 1
2
3 Jones, R., Moisiso, S., Weckroth, M., Woods, M., Luukkonen, J., Meyer, F., & Miggelbrink, J.
4 (2019). Re-conceptualising Territorial Cohesion Through the Prism of Spatial Justice:
5 Critical Perspectives on Academic and Policy Discourses: In: Lang, T.; Gömar, F. (2019):
6 Regional and local development in times of polarisation Re-thinking spatial policies in
7 Europe, 97–119.
8
9
10
11 Kjell, O. N. E. (2011). Sustainable Well-Being: A Potential Synergy between Sustainability and
12 Well-Being Research. *Review of General Psychology*, 15(3), 255–266.
13 <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024603>
14
15
16 Krizek, K., Forysth, A., & Slotterback, C. S. (2009). Is There a Role for Evidence-Based
17 Practice in Urban Planning and Policy? *Planning Theory & Practice*, 10(4), 459–478.
18 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649350903417241>
19
20
21 Kurath, M. M., Marskamp, M., Paulos, J., & Ruegg, J. (2018). *Relational planning: Tracing*
22 *artefacts, agency and practices / Monika Kurath, Marko Marskamp, Julio Paulos, Jean*
23 *Ruegg, editors. Palgrave Macmillan.*
24
25
26 Lefebvre, H. (1967). Le droit à la ville. *L'Homme Et La Société*, 6, 29–35.
27 [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/homso_0018-](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/homso_0018-4306_1967_num_6_1_1063)
28 [4306_1967_num_6_1_1063](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/homso_0018-4306_1967_num_6_1_1063)
29
30
31 Lele, S., & Norgaard, R. B. (1996). Sustainability and the Scientist's Burden. *Conservation*
32 *Biology*, 10(2), 354–365. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1523-1739.1996.10020354.x>
33
34 Luukkonen, J. (2010). Territorial cohesion policy in the light of peripherality. *Town Planning*
35 *Review*, 81(4), 445–466. <https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2010.12>
36
37
38 Madanipour, A., Shucksmith, M., & Brooks, E. (2022). The concept of spatial justice and the
39 European Union's territorial cohesion. *European Planning Studies*, 30(5), 807–824.
40 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1928040>
41
42
43 Managi, S. (Ed.). (2019). *Routledge studies in the modern world economy: Vol. 185. Wealth,*
44 *inclusive growth and sustainability.* Routledge Taylor and Francis Group.
45
46
47 Mendez, C., van der Zwet, A., & Borkowska-Waszak, S. (2021). Rescaling urban development
48 policy in the EU: the impact of integrated place-based approaches in Cohesion Policy.
49 *Regional Studies*, 55(6), 1154–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2021.1891215>
50
51 Nordregio, UMS RIATE, RRG Spatial Planning and Geoinformation, Eurofutures Finland, &
52 LIG. (2007). *Study on Regional disparities and Cohesion: What strategies for the future*
53 *(IP/B/REGI/IC/2006_201).* Brussels.
54
55
56 Nussbaum, M. (2013). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach* (First Harvard
57 University Press paperback edition). The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (Eds.). (1993). *Studies in development economics. The Quality of life:*
4 *Conference Papers - edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen.* Oxford University
5 Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/0198287976.001.0001>
6
7
8 Ossewaarde, M., & Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, R. (2020). The EU's Green Deal: A Third Alternative
9 to Green Growth and Degrowth? *Sustainability*, 12(23), 9825.
10 <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12239825>
11
12
13 Panzera, D., & Postiglione, P. (2022). The impact of regional inequality on economic growth: a
14 spatial econometric approach. *Regional Studies*, 56(5), 687–702.
15 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2021.1910228>
16
17
18 Pickerill, J., & Chatterton, P. (2006). Notes towards autonomous geographies: creation,
19 resistance and self-management as survival tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(6),
20 730–746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132506071516>
21
22
23 Pike, A., Béal, V., Cauchi-Duval, N., Franklin, R., Kinossian, N., Lang, T., Leibert, T.,
24 MacKinnon, D., Rousseau, M., Royer, J., Servillo, L., Tomaney, J., & Velthuis, S. (2023).
25 'Left behind places': a geographical etymology. *Regional Studies*, 1–13.
26 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2023.2167972>
27
28
29 Pike, A., Rodriguez-Pose, A., & Tomaney, J. (2007). What Kind of Local and Regional
30 Development and for Whom? *Regional Studies*, 41(9), 1253–1269.
31 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400701543355>
32
33
34 Pirie, G. H. (1983). On Spatial Justice. *Environment and Planning a: Economy and Space*,
35 15(4), 465–473. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a150465>
36
37
38 Raco, M. (2012). A growth agenda without growth: English spatial policy, sustainable
39 communities, and the death of the neo-liberal project? *GeoJournal*, 77(2), 153–165.
40 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-009-9327-0>
41
42
43 Rauhut, D., & Humer, A. (2020). EU Cohesion Policy and spatial economic growth: trajectories
44 in economic thought. *European Planning Studies*, 3(1), 1–18.
45 <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1709416>
46
47
48 Roberts, P. (2003). Sustainable Development and Social Justice: Spatial Priorities and
49 Mechanisms for Delivery. *Sociological Inquiry*, 73(2), 228–244.
50 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-682X.00054>
51
52
53 Rodriguez-Pose, A. (2018). The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about
54 it). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 11(1), 189–209.
55 <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024>
56
57
58
59
60

- 1
2
3 Rosa, H., & Henning, C. (2017). *The good life beyond growth: New perspectives* / edited by
4 Hartmut Rosa, Christoph Henning (1st). *Routledge studies in ecological economics*.
5 Routledge.
6
7
8 Rutten, R., & Boekema, F. (2012). From Learning Region to Learning in a Socio-spatial
9 Context. *Regional Studies*, 46(8), 981–992. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.712679>
10
11 Sala-i-Martin, X. X. (1996). Regional cohesion: Evidence and theories of regional growth and
12 convergence. *European Economic Review*, 40, 1325–1352.
13
14 Sandler, R. D., & Pezzullo, P. C. (2007). *Environmental justice and environmentalism: The*
15 *social justice challenge to the environmental movement. Urban and industrial environments*.
16 MIT Press.
17
18
19 Sarracino, F. (2019). When Does Economic Growth Improve Well-Being? In Rojas &
20 Chatterjee (Eds.), *Economics of Happiness* (1st ed., pp. 355–370). Springer International
21 Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15835-4_15
22
23 Schmid, B. (2019). Degrowth and postcapitalism: Transformative geographies beyond
24 accumulation and growth. *Geography Compass*, 13(11), 59.
25 <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12470>
26
27
28 Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Anchor Books.
29
30 Sen, A. (2017). *Collective choice and social welfare* (An expanded edition). Harvard University
31 Press.
32
33 Shmueli, D. F. (2008). Framing in geographical analysis of environmental conflicts: Theory,
34 methodology and three case studies. *Geoforum*, 39(6), 2048–2061.
35 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.08.006>
36
37 Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and*
38 *interaction* / David Silverman (3rd ed.). SAGE.
39 <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0660/2006920650-d.html>
40
41 Soja, E. W. (2010). *Seeking spatial justice. Globalization and community series*. University of
42 Minnesota Press; Bristol : University Presses Marketing [distributor].
43
44 Thedvall, R. (2012). Negotiating impartial indicators: putting transparency into practice in the
45 EU. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18(2), 311–329.
46 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01745.x>
47
48 Truffer, B., & Coenen, L. (2012). Environmental Innovation and Sustainability Transitions in
49 Regional Studies. *Regional Studies*, 46(1), 1–21.
50 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.646164>
51
52 Tvrdoň, M. (2012). Cohesion Policy, Convergence and Regional Disparities: the Case of the
53 European Union. *WSEAS TRANSACTIONS on BUSINESS and ECONOMICS*, 9(2).
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

- Voinescu, R., & Moisoiu, C. (2015). Competitiveness, Theoretical and Policy Approaches. Towards a More Competitive EU. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 22, 512–521. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671\(15\)00248-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00248-8)
- Wallerstein, I. (1988). Development: Lodestar or Illusion? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23(39). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4379092?refreqid=excelsior%3A4e78f72deabc5ec098d56fa03a85ba89&seq=1>
- WCED. (1987). *Brundtland Report: Our Common Future (A/42/427)*. World Commission on Environment and Development.
- Weck, S., Madanipour, A., & Schmitt, P. (2022). Place-based development and spatial justice. *European Planning Studies*, 30(5), 791–806. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2021.1928038>
- Weckroth, M., & Moisio, S. (2020). Territorial Cohesion of What and Why? The Challenge of Spatial Justice for EU's Cohesion Policy. *Social Inclusion*, 8(4), 183–193. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v8i4.3241>
- Welch, D., & Yates, L. (2018). The practices of collective action: Practice theory, sustainability transitions and social change. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 48(3), 288–305. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12168>

6 Synthesis

The present thesis was interested in looking beyond growth and competitiveness-oriented answers to regional needs in European territorial development, investigating local action, regional processes and the framing of sustainable development in the context of European cohesion.

Using an empirical mixed-methods approach, combining regional data, stakeholder interviews and an analysis of central documents for European territorial and environmental development, it aimed to answer the question of *how the concept of European territorial cohesion has been translated into regional practices and what could be the missing link to spatial justice and sustainable transitions*. The study process, structured along three main research phases, tackled the sub-questions through three peer-reviewed journal articles. Overall, the research objectives aimed to trace the regional policy translation of European territorial cohesion, look at the context-specific dynamics of cohesion policy implementation, and identify future opportunities to move towards more spatially just and sustainable transitions in European territorial development.

Assessing how the concept has been translated and implemented in heterogeneous regional settings, the study chose a case-study approach looking at the Austrian-Czech-Slovak-Hungarian border region in Central Europe. With cross-border cooperation constituting a major element of European territorial cohesion, it analysed the dynamics of European Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes in the case region.

Arguing that dysfunctional growth dynamics continue to provide economic growth for some European regions while failing to positively contribute the well-being of others, the thesis identified the need for European cohesion policy to move away from redistributive and compensatory logics. The conducted analyses have demonstrated that multiple policy translations in the case region have led to dynamics creating a circular process, through which territorial cohesion fuzziness has been reproduced. This further led to the continued use of fuzzy umbrella concepts by the European Commission to secure territorial cohesion's acceptance, which in turn resulted in a language that displaces actors and suppresses agency through missing responsibilities. Through that, following a rather generalist implementation logic, non-comparable outcomes have been reproduced, fuelling misunderstandings on the policy's aim and added value. Nevertheless, demonstrating the context-dependency of territorial cohesion translation, a strong 'relational' added value appeared to be highly relevant for the regional actors. This was expressed in mutual trust building and learning processes in the course of the cross-border cooperation. Though relational dynamics seemed to be of great relevance for the policy

implementation process, this aspect was rarely reflected in policy documents or scientific debates on territorial cohesion.

Supporting the argument for a context and scale-dependent cohesion, the further investigation of regional processes in the case region has shown that regional diversity has created uneven territorial impacts. Also, as present development measures fail to effectively mitigate the continuance of existing spatial inequalities across European territories, the analysed data indicated that using growth-driven approaches to development fails to capture all dimensions of territorial cohesion at the regional scale. Pointing towards the continued use of mostly uniform policy interventions, the study found that these are only limitedly serving actual sustainable development processes in the regions. As a result, present policy approaches seem to reproduce a catchup-driven struggle for locational competition and funding instead. This also further strengthens the argument for the right to difference, proclaimed as the 'right to not catch up' as a thought experiment interlinking spatial justice and territorial sustainability. The thesis thereby joins long-running critiques on territorial cohesion's implementation and measurement as well as dissatisfaction with business-as-usual models. Offering an alternative to present understandings of sustainable development, spatial justice has been identified as a promising approach that can also reflect horizontal and vertical aspects of regional justice by including the aspect of regional capabilities. Supporting diversity, a spatial justice perspective also better accounts for non-linear regional transition processes under a post-growth paradigm. The analysis thus has pointed out the need for a reframing and rescaling of what is considered successful development at present, for a more balanced and sustainable process across European regions.

Displaying the greater dynamics shaping present regional responses, the thesis further reflected upon the general framing of sustainability and development in European territorial and environmental documents. The conducted framing analysis found that the framing of spatial justice and sustainability was strongly structured along three main categories. It was either seen as a management of resources, a coordinative task when it comes to regional policy measures or as a process, that involves learning and taking informed actions towards sustainability. These perspectives varied across the documents. However, goal setting further shaped identity and value orientation, the phrasing of goals, problematisation, process and actor mobilisation as well as the characterisation of progress. Overall, the study concluded that moving away from a focus on the 'ends', displaying only one-dimensional regional performances, towards the 'means' of the development process, would better serve long-term spatial transition processes. By helping to create an understanding of systemic and relational dynamics of policy implementation, more tailor-made responses to regional needs could be developed.

The thesis therefore argues that when considering present multifaceted regional challenges and

overall global-local interconnections, it is time for a reorientation from distributive and coordinative logics, towards stronger relational approaches. Thereby, it joins Actor-Network-Theory oriented perspectives on development, as such approaches account for learning and collective action-related processes by looking into contexts and relational settings. Stressing the need for more place sensitive responses to regional challenges, the thesis calls for a more detailed look into the actual transition process, with the change process itself becoming a targeted goal. Through an emphasis on 'learning goals' instead of present 'performance goals' in European spatial and environmental policies, new insights into European development processes and regional capabilities could be derived. In consideration of these findings, the thesis concludes that relational, learning- and action-oriented approaches are likely to serve as the missing link to sustainable and just transitions in European spatial policies. Leaving the present 'meeting the needs' focus on sustainable development, seems a necessary response to enable actual green and just territorial development.

Despite the rather theoretical, generalist view of the thesis, which may be considered a limitation of the study, its holistic perspective on the dynamics shaping regional processes can also be viewed as a strength. Still, there is a clear demand for more practice-oriented studies that discuss and provide relevant indicators (e. g. for learning goals) reflecting spatial justice/injustice and sustainable development. At the same time, in order to give more specific European policy advice, different regional settings need to be analysed in comparison, together with an analysis of actual locally performed sustainable development activities and their connection to cohesion policy. Thereby, it would become possible to address the broader spectrum of regional dynamics and local collective action responses. Spatial justice and sustainable regional transition-oriented research furthermore needs more data on how capability-oriented approaches are unfolding in regional contexts and more practical interventions into local resilience building processes. Studies on regional production and consumption, e. g. food, agriculture, energy transitions (McMeekin and Southerton, 2012; Hinrichs, 2014; Vergragt *et al.*, 2016; Gaitán-Cremaschi *et al.*, 2019; Galli *et al.*, 2020; Sandberg, 2021), pose promising approaches to take more systems-oriented perspectives while at the same time addressing present policy frameworks directly.

Still, pointing out what the concept 'does' in regional practice and what dynamics are shaping the overall implementation processes, the thesis contributes valuable new insights into the academic debate on territorial cohesion. Also, in addressing the relevance of more knowledge and action-oriented approaches, it added to interdisciplinary as well as geography-relevant discussions on European territorial development beyond competitive and distributional logics, lobbying for the acknowledgement of regional heterogeneity as a source for future resilience building processes.

7 References

- Abrahams, G. (2014) What “Is” Territorial Cohesion? What Does It “Do”? Essentialist Versus Pragmatic Approaches to Using Concepts. *European Planning Studies* 22.10, 2134–55.
- Anand, P.B. (2007) Capability, Sustainability, and Collective Action: An Examination of a River Water Dispute. *Journal of Human Development* 8.1, 109–32.
- Argyris, C. (1993) *Knowledge for action: A guide to overcoming barriers to organizational change*. The Jossey-Bass social and behavioral science series, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Bachmann-Medick, D. (2016) Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture. In D. Bachmann-Medick (ed.), *Cultural turns: New orientations in the study of culture*, De Gruyter, Berlin.
- Bachtrögl, J., U. Fratesi and G. Perucca (2020) The influence of the local context on the implementation and impact of EU Cohesion Policy. *Regional Studies* 54.1, 21–34.
- Barca, F. (2009) An agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations.
- Barnett, C. (2016) Towards a Geography of Injustice 45.1, 111–18.
- Boarini, R., A. Johansson and M. Mira d'Ercole (2006) Alternative Measures of Well-being. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers 33.
- Boyatzis, R.E. (1998) *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development / Richard E. Boyatzis*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, Calif and London.
- CEC (1983) 6th Conference of the Council of Europe of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT): Torremolinos Charter [WWW document]. URL <http://rm.coe.int/6th-european-conference-of-ministers-responsible-for-regional-planning/168076dd93>.
- CEC (1991) Europe 2000 Outlook for the development of the Community's territory: A preliminary overview (Luxembourg) [WWW document]. URL <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/b1380f75-b5c2-4deb-94b4-49ab9a6c853b/language-en>.
- CEC (1992) Treaty on European Union: Maastricht [WWW document]. URL https://www.google.at/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=4&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjknqLm2uTZAhWEDewKHS9NC1cQFghuMAM&url=https%3A%2F%2Feuropa.eu%2F%2F-european-union%2F%2F%2Ffiles%2Fdocs%2Fbody%2F%2Ftreaty_on_european_union_en.pdf&usq=A0vVaw32uyViAhwYAbIU2OZzRB4L.
- CEC (1995) *Europe 2000+. Cooperation for European territorial development*.
- CEC (1997) *Treaty of Amsterdam: Amending the Treaty on European Union, The Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Certain Related Acts*, Office for Official
-

-
- Publications of the European Communities; Bernan Associates [distributor], Luxembourg and Lanham Md.
- CEC (1999) *ESDP - European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*, Office for Official Publ. of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- CEC (2001a) *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development: Communication from the Commission. Commission's proposal to the Gothenburg European Council. [WWW document]. URL <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52001DC0264:EN:HTML>.*
- CEC (2001b) *Second Report on Economic and Social Cohesion [WWW document]. URL <http://aei.pitt.edu/80576/>.*
- CEC (2001c) *The Lisbon Strategy.*
- CEC (2007a) *Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion [WWW document]. URL <http://aei.pitt.edu/42150/>.*
- CEC (2007b) *Treaty of Lisbon [WWW document]. URL <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12007L%2FTXT>.*
- CEC (2008) *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee: Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, turning territorial diversity into strength. COM(2008) 616 final (Brussels).*
- CEC (2011) *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 : Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions (Gödöllő).*
- CEC (2013a) *Common provision on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006: Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 (Brussels).*
- CEC (2013b) *General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 - Living well, within the limits of our planet: Decision No 1386/2013 EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 (Brussels).*
- CEC (ed.) (2013c) *Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation goal.*
- CEC (2017a) *My Region, my Europe, Our Future: Seventh report on economic, social and*
-

-
- territorial cohesion. Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion (Luxembourg). CEC (2017b) Seventh Report on economic, social and territorial cohesion: My Region, My Europe, Our Future [WWW document]. URL http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/cohesion-report/.
- CEC (2019) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The European Green Deal (Brussels).
- CEC (2020a) Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a general Union Environment Action Programme to 2030: COM(2020) 652 final [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/environment/document/download/4b2e129d-2d20-4738-965b-7bcfc1a97d71_de.
- CEC (2020b) Territorial Agenda 2030: A future for all places [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/territorial_agenda_2030_en.pdf.
- CEC (2021) Common provision on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy: Regulation EU No 2021/1060 (Brussels).
- Collins Dictionary (2022) Cohesion [WWW document]. URL <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/de/worterbuch/englisch/cohesion>.
- Crescenzi, R. and M. Giua (2020) One or many Cohesion Policies of the European Union? On the differential economic impacts of Cohesion Policy across member states. *Regional Studies* 54.1, 10–20.
- Dao, H., P. Plagnat Cantoreggi and V. Rousseaux (2017) Operationalizing a contested concept: indicators of territorial cohesion. *European Planning Studies* 25.4, 638–60.
- Davies, R. (2014) Measuring well-being and progress: Looking beyond GDP [WWW document]. URL <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/140738REV1-Measuring-well-being-and-progress-FINAL.pdf>.
- Davoudi, S. (2005) Understanding territorial cohesion. *Planning Practice and Research* 20.4, 433–41.
- Dikeç, M. (2001) Justice and the Spatial Imagination. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 33.10, 1785–805.
- Domorenok, E. (2009) The Committee of the Regions: in Search of Identity. *Regional & Federal Studies* 19.1, 143–63.
-

-
- Druckman, J. (2004) Political Preference Formation: Competition, Deliberation, and the (Ir)relevance of Framing Effects. *American Political Science Review* 98.4, 671–86.
- Dühr, S., D. Stead and W. Zonneveld (2007) The Europeanization of spatial planning through territorial cooperation. *Planning Practice and Research* 22.3, 291–307.
- Dweck, C.S. (1986) Motivational processes affecting learning. *American Psychologist* 41.10, 1040–48.
- Dweck, C.S. (1999) *Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development* / Carol S. Dweck. Essays in social psychology, Psychology Press, Philadelphia and Hove.
- EC (2015a) Country Fact Sheet: Česká republika [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-fact-sheet-czech-republic.
- EC (2015b) Country Fact Sheet: Magyarország [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-hungary.
- EC (2015c) Country Fact Sheet: Österreich [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-austria.
- EC (2015d) Country Fact Sheet: Slovensko [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2015/country-profile-key-indicators-slovakia.
- EC (2017) Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions. COM(2017) 534 final (Brussels).
- EC (2022) Regional policy: EU regional and urban development [WWW document]. URL https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index.cfm/en/.
- ESPON (2017) PROFECY – Processes, Features and Cycles of Inner Peripheries in Europe: Inner Peripheries: National territories facing challenges of access to basic services of general interest. 07/12/2017 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.espon.eu/inner-peripheries>.
- Evers, D. (2012) A Solution in Search of a Problem: A ‘Garbage Can’ Approach to the Politics of Territorial Cohesion. *European Journal of Spatial Development* 45.
- Faburel, G. (2012) The Environment as a Factor of Spatial Injustice: A New Challenge for the Sustainable Development of European Regions? In C. Ghenai (ed.), *Sustainable Development: Policy and Urban Development - Tourism, Life Science, Management and Environment*. Vol. 1772, IntechOpen.
- Fainstein, S.S. (2001) Competitiveness, Cohesion, and Governance: Their Implications for Social Justice. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25.4, 884–88.
- Fainstein, S.S. (2010) *The just city*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y.
-

-
- Faludi, A. (2001) The Application of the European Spatial Development Perspective: Evidence from the North-West Metropolitan Area. *European Planning Studies* 9.5, 663–75.
- Faludi, A. (2006) From European spatial development to territorial cohesion policy. *Regional Studies* 40.6, 667–78.
- Faludi, A. (2007) Territorial Cohesion Policy and the European Model of Society¹. *European Planning Studies* 15.4, 567–83.
- Faludi, A. (2016) EU territorial cohesion, a contradiction in terms. *Planning Theory & Practice* 17.2, 302–13.
- Faludi, A. and B. Waterhout (2006) Introducing Evidence-Based Planning. *disP - The Planning Review* 42.165, 4–13.
- Fukuda-Parr, S. (2003) THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM: OPERATIONALIZING SEN'S IDEAS ON CAPABILITIES. *Feminist Economics* 9.2-3, 301–17.
- Gaitán-Cremaschi, D., L. Klerkx, J. Duncan, J.H. Trienekens, C. Huenchuleo, S. Dogliotti, M.E. Contesse and W.A.H. Rossing (2019) Characterizing diversity of food systems in view of sustainability transitions. A review. *Agronomy for Sustainable Development* 39.1, 1.
- Galli, F., P. Prosperi, E. Favilli, S. D'Amico, F. Bartolini and G. Brunori (2020) How can policy processes remove barriers to sustainable food systems in Europe? Contributing to a policy framework for agri-food transitions. *Food Policy* 96, 101871.
- Hajer, M.A. and H. Wagenaar (2003) *Deliberative policy analysis: Understanding governance in the network society*. Theories of institutional design, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, USA.
- Harvey, D. (1976) *Social Justice and the City*, Edward Arnold, London.
- Harvey, D. (2003) The right to the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27.4, 939–41.
- Hickel, J. and G. Kallis (2020) Is Green Growth Possible? *New Political Economy* 25.4, 469–86.
- Hinrichs, C.C. (2014) Transitions to sustainability: a change in thinking about food systems change? *Agriculture and Human Values* 31.1, 143–55.
- Holman, N. (2009) Incorporating local sustainability indicators into structures of local governance: a review of the literature. *Local Environment* 14.4, 365–75.
- Inforegio (2011) Contributions to the consultation: Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion – Turning territorial diversity into strength [WWW document]. URL http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/consultation/terco/contrib_en.htm (accessed 10 March 2018).
- Interreg AT-CZ (2015) Cooperation Programme AT-CZ 2014 – 2020: Final Version [WWW document]. URL <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg AT-CZ (2018) Bewertungsplan Kooperationsprogramm INTERREG V-A Österreich –
-

-
- Tschechische Republik: 17.05.2018 beschlossene Version 3 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg AT-CZ (2019) Annual Implementation Report 2018: 21-Jun-2019 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.at-cz.eu/at/downloads/programm> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg AT-HU (2016) Evaluation Plan: Final version as approved by the MC on 14 December 2016 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg AT-HU (2018a) Annual Implementation Report 2018: Reporting period: 01.01.2018 – 31.12.2018 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed 20.03.20).
- Interreg AT-HU (2018b) Cooperation Programme AT-HU 2014 - 2020: Version 3.0 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.interreg-athu.eu/downloads/programmdokumente/> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg SK-AT (2015) Interreg V-A Slovakia-Austria cooperation programme: Version 11th June 2015 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg SK-AT (2018a) Annual Implementation Report 2018: June 2019 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Interreg SK-AT (2018b) INTERREG V-A Programme Slovak Republic - Austria 2014 - 2020 Evaluation Plan: Version 2.0 12/12/2018 [WWW document]. URL <https://www.sk-at.eu/de/downloads> (accessed 18.03.20).
- Jackson, T. (2011) *Prosperity without growth: Economics for a finite planet* / Tim Jackson, Earthscan, London.
- Jones, R., S. Moisiso, M. Weckroth, M. Woods, J. Luukkonen, F. Meyer and J. Miggelbrink (2019) Re-conceptualising Territorial Cohesion Through the Prism of Spatial Justice: Critical Perspectives on Academic and Policy Discourses. In, *Regional and Local Development in Times of Polarisation*, Springer Singapore, Singapore.
- Kjell, O.N.E. (2011) Sustainable Well-Being: A Potential Synergy between Sustainability and Well-Being Research. *Review of General Psychology* 15.3, 255–66.
- Kurath, M.M., M. Marskamp, J. Paulos and J. Ruegg (2018) *Relational planning: Tracing artefacts, agency and practices* / Monika Kurath, Marko Marskamp, Julio Paulos, Jean Ruegg, editors, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland.
- Lefebvre, H. (1970) *La Révolution urbaine*. Idées. Vol. 216, Gallimard, [Paris].
- Lehtonen, M. (2004) The environmental–social interface of sustainable development: capabilities, social capital, institutions. *Ecological Economics* 49.2, 199–214.
- Luukkonen, J. (2010) Territorial cohesion policy in the light of peripherality. *Town Planning Review* 81.4, 445–66.
-

-
- Markusen, A. (1999) Fuzzy Concepts, Scanty Evidence, Policy Distance: The Case for Rigour and Policy Relevance in Critical Regional Studies. *Regional Studies* 33.9, 869–84.
- McMeekin, A. and D. Southerton (2012) Sustainability transitions and final consumption: practices and socio-technical systems. *Technology Analysis & Strategic Management* 24.4, 345–61.
- Medeiros, E. (2014) Assessing territorial impacts of the EU cohesion policy at the regional level: the case of Algarve. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 32.3, 198–212.
- Medeiros, E. (2016) Territorial Cohesion: An EU concept. *European Journal of Spatial Development* 60, 1–30.
- Mohai, P., D. Pellow and J.T. Roberts (2009) Environmental Justice. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 34.1, 405–30.
- Mulíček, O. and J. Malý (2019) Moving towards more cohesive and polycentric spatial patterns? Evidence from the Czech Republic. *Papers in Regional Science* 98.2, 1177–94.
- Niebuhr, A. and S. Stiller (2003) Territorial Disparities in Europe. *Intereconomics*.
- Nordregio, UMS RIATE, RRG Spatial Planning and Geoinformation, Eurofutures Finland and LIG (2007) Study on Regional disparities and Cohesion: What strategies for the future. IP/B/REGI/IC/2006_201 (Brussels).
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2013) *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England.
- Nussbaum, M.C. and A. Sen (eds.) (1993) *The Quality of life: Conference Papers - edited by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen*. Studies in development economics, Oxford University Press.
- OECD (2008) *Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators: Methodology and User Guide*, OECD, Paris.
- Petschow, U., N. Aus dem Moore, E. Pissarskoi, T. Korfhage, S. Lange, A. Schoofs and D. Hofmann (2018) Social well-being within planetary boundaries: The precautionary post-growth approach. 89 [WWW document]. URL https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/sites/default/files/medien/1410/publikationen/uba_texte_89_2018_precautionary_post-growth_approach_executive_summary.pdf.
- Pike, A., A. Rodríguez-Pose and J. Tomaney (2007) What Kind of Local and Regional Development and for Whom? *Regional Studies* 41.9, 1253–69.
- Piper, W.E., M. Marrache, R. Lacroix, A.M. Richardsen and B.D. Jones (1983) Cohesion as a Basic Bond in Groups. *Human Relations* 36.2, 93–108.
- Pirie, G.H. (1983) On Spatial Justice. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 15.4, 465–73.
- Pye, S., I. Skinner, N. Meyer-Ohlendorf, A. Leipprand, K. Lucas and R. Salomons (2008) Addressing the social dimensions of environmental policy: A study on the linkages
-

-
- between environmental and social sustainability in Europe [WWW document]. URL <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=1672&langId=en>.
- Rauhut, D. and A. Humer (2020) EU Cohesion Policy and spatial economic growth: trajectories in economic thought. *European Planning Studies* 3.1, 1–18.
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A theory of justice*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Rosa, H. and C. Henning (2017) *The good life beyond growth: New perspectives / edited by Hartmut Rosa, Christoph Henning*. Routledge studies in ecological economics, Routledge, London.
- Rutten, R. and F. Boekema (2012) From Learning Region to Learning in a Socio-spatial Context. *Regional Studies* 46.8, 981–92.
- Sala-i-Martin, X.X. (1996) Regional cohesion: Evidence and theories of regional growth and convergence. *European Economic Review* 40, 1325–52.
- Sandberg, M. (2021) Sufficiency transitions: A review of consumption changes for environmental sustainability. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 293, 126097.
- Sandler, R.L. and P.C. Pezzullo (2007) *Environmental justice and environmentalism: The social justice challenge to the environmental movement*. Urban and industrial environments, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.
- Sassen, S. (2001) *The global city: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J and Oxford.
- Schlosberg, D. and L.B. Collins (2014) From environmental to climate justice: climate change and the discourse of environmental justice. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 5.3, 359–74.
- Schmid, B. (2019) Degrowth and postcapitalism: Transformative geographies beyond accumulation and growth. *Geography Compass* 13.11, 59.
- Seawright, J. and J. Gerring (2008) Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research. *Political Research Quarterly* 61.2, 294–308.
- Sen, A.K. (1999) *Development as freedom*, Anchor Books, New York, NY.
- Sen, A.K. (2010) The idea of justice. *Social Choice and Welfare* 35.4, 709–20.
- Shmueli, D.F. (2008) Framing in geographical analysis of environmental conflicts: Theory, methodology and three case studies. *Geoforum* 39.6, 2048–61.
- Siebold, G.L. (1999) The Evolution of the Measurement of Cohesion. *Military Psychology* 11.1, 5–26.
- Silverman, D. (2006) *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction / David Silverman*, SAGE, London.
- Soja, E.W. (2010) *Seeking spatial justice*. Globalization and community series, University of Minnesota Press; Bristol : University Presses Marketing [distributor], Minneapolis, Minn.
-

-
- Soja, E.W. (2011) *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. Radical thinkers, Verso, London and New York.
- Stiglitz, J.E., A. Sen and J.-P. Fitoussi (2010) *Mismeasuring our lives: Why GDP doesn't add up*, New Press, New York.
- Storper, M. (2011) Justice, efficiency and economic geography: should places help one another to develop? *European Urban and Regional Studies* 18.1, 3–21.
- Tvrdon, M. (2012) Cohesion Policy, Convergence and Regional Disparities: the Case of the European Union. *WSEAS TRANSACTIONS on BUSINESS and ECONOMICS* 9.2.
- UN (1992) United Nations Conference on Environment & Development Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992: Agenda 21.
- UNFCCC (2015) Paris Agreement.
- van Well, L. (2012) Conceptualizing the Logics of Territorial Cohesion. *European Planning Studies* 20.9, 1549–67.
- Vergragt, P.J., L. Dendler, M. de Jong and K. Matus (2016) Transitions to sustainable consumption and production in cities. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 134, 1–12.
- Wackernagel, M. and W. Rees (1996) *Our ecological footprint: Reducing human impact on earth*. The new Catalyst bioregional series, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia.
- WCED (1987) Brundtland Report: Our Common Future. A/42/427.
- Weck, S., A. Madanipour and P. Schmitt (2022) Place-based development and spatial justice. *European Planning Studies* 30.5, 791–806.
- Weckroth, M. and S. Moisiu (2020) Territorial Cohesion of What and Why? The Challenge of Spatial Justice for EU's Cohesion Policy. *Social Inclusion* 8.4, 183–93.
- Yin, R.K. (2014) *Case study research: Design and methods*, SAGE, Los Angeles and London.
- Young, I.M. (1990) *Justice and the politics of difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. and Oxford.
- Zaucha, J. and K. Böhme (2019) Measuring territorial cohesion is not a mission impossible. *European Planning Studies* 60.2, 1–23.
- Zonneveld, W. and B. Waterhout (2005) Visions on territorial cohesion 76.1, 14–27.

Appendix

Guideline for stakeholder interviews

Interview Guideline

Stakeholder

DISSERTATION PROJECT "REGIONAL ASPECTS OF EUROPEAN COHESION POLICY"

Background

1. How long do you already work in the programme and what is your personal background, how did you come here?

Territorial Cohesion

2. What is your understanding of the term „territorial cohesion“?
3. Are there differences in the understanding of the term “territorial cohesion” between the commission, national and regional level/authorities?

Centroppe

4. Does your institution participate in the Centroppe Regions activities? If so: Please describe die current development of the activities in your region – are there new projects planned or is there a standstill?
5. How did the regions participation in the Centroppe Region started and who was involved in the implementation (experts, locals)?
6. How do you estimate the future development of the Centroppe Region?

Current programme period, network and programme implementation in the Region / INTERREG V-A

7. In your own experience, how did the cooperation between the partner regions develop since the EU eastern enlargement?
8. What experiences do you have with the current cooperation / interaction (formal/informal) between the partner regions, what works well and where are often the main challenges?
9. How is the actor network composed and is there a fluctuation/stability of the actors (actors are easy to replace or difficult to replace)?
10. Please describe the expectations of the cooperation partners regarding the projects (consensus, dissent, contradictions), did these change over time?

Education cooperation

11. Is there any education cooperation being currently implemented in the region, if so on what topics?
12. Of what importance are education cooperation when it comes to the cohesion process and the development of the border regions?

Problem definition

13. How are the regional ‘needs for action’ being identified and who is involved in that process, are there also intersections with other programmes (e.g. LEADER)?
14. How far, compared to past programme periods, did the setting of priorities / the topics change over time?
15. What part does the EU co-financing play when it comes to the maintenance, stability and intensity of current/future cooperation?

Sustainability of the results and added value

16. How do you assess the success of the current programme so far?
17. What is the idea behind the programmes impact orientation (outputs, outcomes, results) and what do you think about its significance (informative value)?
18. Please describe the, in your own opinion, central aspects of successful cross-border cooperation, when do you perceive an intervention as successful?
19. Does the cooperation in the course the EU cohesion programmes bring a ‚added value‘ for the regions, the stakeholders and the involved actors and if so, what is its added value?
20. What do you wish for the future of cross-border cooperation programmes?