

# DOES TERRITORY REALLY MATTER AND, IF SO, HOW?

Frédéric Santamaria<sup>a</sup>, Bernard Elissalde<sup>b</sup>

(Received 11 March 2019; revised version received 5 March 2020; final version accepted 3 November 2020)

## Abstract

The ambitions of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in relation to the development of European Union space seem to have been dissolved in the notion of territory which has become a key word in EU Cohesion Policy. The term 'territory' has been the subject of many debates, from attempts at definitions, to its rejection as a marker of a renunciation of the aspiration to reflect on, and adjust, development to spatial realities. Based on a constructivist definition of the concept of territory, this article argues that it is not possible to separate territory as a 'container' from the various realities of space in so far as the two dimensions are closely intertwined. Furthermore, it could be useful to consider these two dimensions in analysing EU space when reflecting on spatial planning at this scale.

### *Keywords*

*ESDP, Territory, Soft Space, European Union*

---

a (Corresponding author) Université Grenoble-Alpes, Institut d'urbanisme et de géographie alpine, Laboratoire de sciences sociales Pacte, 14 - 14 bis avenue Marie Reynoard, 38100 Grenoble, France. E-mail: frederic.santamaria@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr

b Université de Rouen, UMR CNRS IDEES, 7 rue Thomas Becket, 76821 Mont-Saint Aignan Cedex, France. E-mail: bernard.elissalde@univ-rouen.fr

## 1. Introduction

Twenty years after the launch of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), the context of European integration is deeply different from that which prevailed at the end of the 1990s. The trend seems to have shifted, at best towards particularities and at worst towards dislocation forces, leading to the risk of triggering a process of 'de-europeanisation'. In the area of territorial policies, over recent decades we have witnessed both the pursuit of institutionalisation, and reorientations highlighting the scattering and malleability of the various meanings of territorial policies. These include the rejection of 'territorialism' (Faludi, 2013, 2016), the ideas of some official reports (Barca, 2009), and applied research (for example the ESPON programme) that proposed different theoretical renewals. Other proposals for territorial development policies explored the ideas of 'soft space' which sought to transcend institutional boundaries (Stead, 2014). These debates give a rather fuzzy image of the use of the notion of territory in European policies of spatial development. As a consequence, the aim of this paper is to try to circumvent this notion and answer simple questions: does territory really matter and, if so, how?

First, we argue that territory has become a key-concept to counterbalance the difficulties of the Europeanisation of spatial planning through the ESDP. This can be viewed as a pragmatic adjustment to a reality where the concept of territory is introduced to solve various difficulties that European initiatives face. Secondly, and derived from the above, territory has been promoted and imbued with virtues because it chimes with the evolving state of the EU (enlargement, increasing diversities) as well as its political and ideological mood ('do more with less', supporting individual initiatives, good governance, and so on). Thirdly, this appeal to the territory has also triggered various criticisms of a theoretical and analytical nature to which can also be added, the renouncement of the 'big picture' perspective that the ESDP once advocated. Alternatively, the concept can be taken as the privileged tool to solve many problems the EU is facing in terms of cohesion or, on the contrary, be seen as the engine of its disintegration. However, it seems to us that a proper use of the concept of territory could be a path to new thinking regarding European spatial development and even European spatial planning in so far as it can be properly defined and adapted to the characteristics of the EU space.

## 2. The ESDP: An Ambiguous Dynamic

The adoption of the ESDP in 1999 has been considered as the completion of long-standing thinking that dated back to the end of the 1960s with regards to the ambition of developing a spatial plan for Europe<sup>1</sup>. The ESDP became, and remains, the reference document for action in terms of development and spatial planning at EU scale (e.g. the Territorial Agendas of 2007 and 2011 and proposed new Territorial Agenda 2030<sup>2</sup> all reflect it). However, since its long preparation process, this document nevertheless has also had shortcomings that have impacted on its relevance as a guide to spatial planning policies across Europe.

The ESDP was prepared through an intergovernmental process based on negotiations between Member States to reach a consensus. As a result, the process did not form part of the EU institutional process *per se*. The ESDP is merely a political agreement between States and there are no obligations to take it into account. Its content can also be questioned. As a consensus document, its objectives are still quite generic reflecting the consensus between Member States and among the planning community at that time. As Faludi and Waterhout point out, the idea of a masterplan at EU scale was rejected from the beginning of the ESDP process as Member States refused to have a prescriptive document (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). Consequently, it does not include any cartographic representations that would make it possible to specify in spatially specific terms the policy orientations it promotes. It does not include quantified targets to guide action and ensure, over time, that objectives are achieved (Doucet, 2007). Thus, while it represents a breakthrough in the development of strategic planning at the European Union level, it falls short of the ambition of the European Parliament at the beginning

---

1 The European Parliament adopted a new resolution calling on the Council to ask the European Commission to submit 'proposals leading to the definition of a balanced European Spatial Plan' (quoted in Drevet, 2008, p.47) (translation by authors).

2 The new version of the Territorial Agenda (TA 2030) was approved by Member States in December 2020. It is intended to update and review the first two Territorial Agendas of the European Union from 2007 and 2011, which are in turn, based on the ESDP of 1999.

of the 1980s recorded in its 1983 *Report on a European Regional Planning Scheme*<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, it was based on expert inputs (Faludi, 1997) without taking into account stakeholders at infra-national levels even though given the nature of this document and the principle of subsidiarity, the latter should have been taken into account (Santamaria, 2009).

The situation described above, explains why certain spatial planning literature invoked the notion that ESDP objectives should be assessed in terms of their *application* as opposed to their *implementation* (Faludi, 2001, 2003). Deriving from the idea of application, such a document should help to 'shape the minds' and thus influence the infra-European actors who define planning policies at their levels. The idea of application corresponds to the fact that planning actors take into account the European context for the territory in which they operate. It also implies a necessary adaptation between ESDP objectives and realities on the ground (a process which might be termed 'Europeanisation from within' - see Purkarthofer, 2018 and in this issue). The ESDP can, therefore, be considered as guidance to be adapted to various national, regional and local settings with the relevance of its orientations and application being dependent on the context. Based on this idea, the ESPON report entitled *Application of the ESDP in the Member States* showed a limited application of the ESDP at EU level and in the countries studied (ESPON, 2007). While the existence of ideas comparable to those of the ESDP can be identified in planning documents at infra-European levels, there are usually no explicit references to the European document. It is even more difficult to identify the tangible and significant effects the ESDP has had on the shaping of actions and policies. Therefore, one can note the weakness of the consideration of the ESDP in the Member States. Consequently, if the ESDP was a breakthrough in the Europeanisation of spatial planning, its concrete results appear not to have matched the ambition to exert a deep influence on spatial planning initiatives at infra EU levels. At EU scale, while it was promoted during a period when the integration dynamic was strong (Maastricht Treaty, single currency, etc.) in an EU with only 15 members, the changing context of the EU during the 2000's can explain why, beyond the mixed results of the ESDP itself, the way of looking at European space was about to change.

### 3. From Space to Territory: Looking for a Fit

Due to EU enlargements in the post 2000 period, (which saw a rise in the level of internal disparities and inequalities inside the EU), a new rhetoric for the European institutions appeared which is summed up by the following motto: 'Turning territorial diversity into strength'. The latter phrase was the subtitle of the 2008 Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (European Commission, 2008). This 'territorial turn' was first related to the reference to 'territorial cohesion' in the Treaties as a priority action for the EU. Discussion of this dates back to the beginning of the 1990s when it was supported by the Assembly of the Regions of Europe and the first reference to 'territorial cohesion' in a treaty dates back to the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. However, it was in the Lisbon Treaty, ten years later, that territorial cohesion joined economic and social cohesion as a shared competence of the Union and Member States.

This inclusion of territorial cohesion as a Treaty objective provided a legal justification to EU regional policy, and by extension to EU actions that sought to guarantee that each European citizen had the same opportunities regardless of where they happened to live in the Union. It also made it possible to take into account the diversity of European countries and societies whilst fostering a desire to ensure that the ties that unite European territories were strengthened ('cohesion'). Indeed, the reference to the territorial dimension allowed everyone to identify their privileged territory of action: the Union for the Commission, the Nation for the Member States, the regions for infra-national bodies, and so on. It is therefore an expression of/for incorporating a multi-scale approach that is very useful in the definition and implementation of European policies. As a consequence it is the different territories of the Union, which are concerned with cohesion (Elissalde et al., 2008). In addition, it being a polysemic term, the notion of territory, in its different lexical forms and, in particular, as a qualifier (territorial), has become a major reference both in the EU vocabulary and in applied research on spatial development at the EU scale. In the periodic EU 'Cohesion reports' for instance, we can identify five usages

---

3 'The aim of our report is to demonstrate the urgent need for a voluntarist scheme to give coherence and purpose to the various Community operations by ensuring the harmonisation of States actions and the establishment of a common policy.' (European Parliament, 1983, p. 21)

and meanings: a country, a unit to manage public funding, a space with peculiar features, a political project ('territorial cohesion'), and a term related to impact assessments of actions on space<sup>4</sup> (Elissalde et al., 2013).

Various initiatives have been derived from this search for territorial cohesion. The Territorial Agendas of 2007 and 2011 that referred to the ESDP (and the new version of the Territorial Agenda by the Member States in December 2020) can be seen as attempts to consider this new objective and the underlying need to take into account the territorial diversity of Europe when implementing ESDP objectives and cohesion policies (Faludi, 2007). In 2009, the Barca report which was prepared at the request of the Commissioner for Regional Policy, proposed to reform Cohesion Policy using a place-based approach to meet European challenges and expectations in terms of the spatial development of the Union's whole space. For the 2007-2013 programming period, considerations of the territorial dimensions of the Cohesion Policy led to the adoption of programmes which adapted to the different territories of Europe according to their individual geographical characteristics. The same emphasis on more territorially oriented action was also a feature of the subsequent 2014-2020 programming period, notably through the Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) instrument that promotes a more place-based form of policy making. Finally, from the point of view of the implementation of policies, territories - especially those at local scales - appear as privileged places for the articulation of policies implying integrated conceptions of development which involve various actors. Consequently, another outworking of the reference to territory, is the better adjustment of the EU Cohesion Policy to territorial realities in a context of subsidiarity and promotion of multi-level governance (in the absence of EU competence) and horizontal governance (territorial governance). Beyond looking for a better fit in terms of the governance of policies, it is also the search for effectiveness that is at stake: territorialisation of actions is considered, *a priori*, as virtuous for the easier and more efficient use of EU Cohesion Policy funds on the ground. All these elements are still used today to support the rationale of the Territorial Agenda 2030 agreed by Member States at the end of 2020. One of the aims of the latter is strengthening the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels, taking into account the diversity of places in Europe, along with their development potential and challenges.

In addition, territory refers to various ideas that are promoted by the EU where the convergence objective appears as an unreachable horizon, notably because of enlargement and the reluctance to substantially increase the budget for regional policies. From the end of the 2000s (the 2007 – 2013 programming period) until now, the focus has instead been on the promotion of the resources of each place, specialization and its corollary complementarity, and on multilevel governance (territorial governance); implying that all public and private actors are considered as 'resources' for spatial development. These new orientations are sustained by the idea that each place (territory) has its own development potentials and that it can, as a consequence, participate, in the development of the EU's whole territory at its own level. From this perspective territorial diversity is no longer considered a problem, but a strength from which it is possible to build a common dynamic of development.

This notion seems to make it possible to overcome theoretical blockages as regards development by differentiating regional development and territorial development:

Inspired by great authors such as Walter Isard or François Perroux, the regional development approach is based on a pragmatic vision of geographical divisions and considers the region<sup>5</sup> as a unit of economic observation (Torre, 2015, p.275, translated by authors).

As Baudelle et al. (2011) observe, development processes cannot be reduced solely to the behaviour of productive actors, but extend to other stakeholders: local authorities, decentralized State services, associations, and so on. In addition, the processes of cooperation and social construction are included in the analysis of development dynamics. Such an approach corresponds to the definition of territorial development. Nevertheless, although

---

4 "A 'territorial impact' can be considered to be any impact on a given geographically defined territory, whether on spatial usage, governance, or on wider economic, social or environmental aspects, which results from the introduction or transposition of an EU directive or policy" (ESPON, 2012, p.26).

5 Region here not in the sense of an administrative body but as a portion of the earth's space that can be individualised by a particular criterion (mountain region, urban region, Mediterranean region etc.).

territory is decked with all the virtues, its use by the EU leaves a number of issues in the shadows and it is sometimes the subject of critical analysis or, merely, outright rejection.

#### 4. Territory, a Notion Discussed and Even Contested

Even if the debate is rarely approached like this, it can be suggested, at least in the first instance, that use of the concept of territory constitutes an implicit renunciation of the ambition of the ESDP, that of an EU-wide approach.

What is more, it is assumed that territorial development (place-based) will have an impact on the whole EU space as a kind of virtuous accumulative process. However, it seems all the more difficult to validate this idea as long as each territory is expected to rely on its own resources, and its own potential. The justification of such an approach is based on a positive rhetoric where each territory is unique and has specific territorial assets to promote. If this discourse pleases actors of a given territory, it confirms more surely the initial situation of inequalities while simultaneously questioning the objective of convergence. Indeed, even in the long term, to base development on the resources of a territory is to renounce the aspiration of reducing development gaps and therefore the long-term goal of convergence. This ironically echoes the first reflections on the implementation of a regional policy that date back to the beginning of the 1960s: 'The net result of the Common Market, in the absence of an active regional policy, would probably be for the peripheral regions to progress more rapidly than has hitherto been the case, without, however, reducing the gap which separates them from central regions. It is not excluded that this gap may increase in certain cases' (European Commission, 1961, p.28, translation by the authors).

Today, under the guise of respect for diversity - but also in the face of the operational impasse pertaining to an EU-wide development scheme - the territorial cohesion discourse emphasises the potential strengths of each European 'territory'. Coupled with a focus on their apparent uniqueness, this seems to validate the idea that each entity must be able to cope in international competition within and outwith the EU if its actors duly promote territorial resources, specialization and, if necessary, complementarity. All these keywords can appear as elements of the renunciation of the initial objectives of regional policy as well as an attempt to adapt EU spaces to the long-term effects of international competition. At the same time, they also allow the new orientations of the regional policy to be presented, in a flattering way. From that perspective, the territorial approach can appear as a mere 'garbage can solution to a problem' (Evers, 2012).

Even if the term territory and all its permutations are today broadly used at the EU level, the word itself seems problematic to certain academics. Putting aside the issue of the definition of this term in English which only refers to institutional spaces, territory is often presented as a fixed container that would prevent sound spatial planning and development action. The expression 'territorialism' is then used to criticise a way to approach space that is only organised on the basis of political and administrative boundaries. Alternatively, the concept of 'soft space' (as opposed to 'hard ones') has been proposed and developed over recent years. Soft spaces are considered as spaces where a diversity of actors can interact to identify the right space for development and planning actions according to what is at stake on the ground (Faludi, 2016).

As already pointed out, these debates are rather confusing because it is difficult to understand what is meant when using the word territory. For the EU, it seems to be a way to adapt, *nolens volens*, regional policy to EU diversity. This gives rise to criticisms that, at best, this new territorial discourse is a way to solve a political problem; and at worst it is a renunciation of the initial objective of the EU in terms of the convergence, or even equalization, of the standard of living across Europe. Finally, for some, the term 'territory' embodies spaces delineated by politico-administrative boundaries that cannot be considered as relevant spaces for spatial development and planning actions.

Taking this situation into account, it is important to propose a definition and to adapt the notion of 'territory' to the issues that the EU is facing in general, but also with specific regard to spatial planning. In so doing, special attention should be given to answering the following three questions: i). Can the concept of territory help in thinking about planning at the EU level? ii). If so, what would be its value in from this perspective?; and iii). how can criticisms of territorialism be answered?

## 5. Territory / Soft Space - a False Dichotomy?

The writings that critique 'territorialism', present administrative spaces as poorly adapted to the implementation of development policies. In these analyses, the territory only refers to space controlled by a Nation-State:

In debates, the EU territory is commonly seen as the sum of the territories of its members, a nested hierarchy of bounded spaces. EU policy thus becomes a 'politics of scale' (in Perkmann, 2007, p.255-256) concerning reallocating governance functions from where they were previously located [...]. The institution of boundaries goes hand in hand with the establishment of sovereign authority wielding exclusive power over a homogenous territory' (Faludi, 2013, p.1305).

Rather, it should be seen as comprising overlapping and intersecting areas, each requiring its own governance. In fact, European space itself cannot be conceived of as a fixed container, but rather as the intersection between various spatial configurations. The implication for European planning, true also for strategic planning generally, is to abandon the pursuit of spatially integrated policies. Instead, planning should be seen as being about producing parallel and overlapping schemes for the various territorial and functional spaces concerned. The planning that comes from this is 'soft' (Faludi, 2016, p.78).

However, in spite of the rather fuzzy use of the concept of territory by the EU in the framework of regional policy, the criticisms of 'territorialism' appear excessive. Indeed, the different uses of territory as mentioned above (sections 2 and 3) tend to reflect a will to better adjust EU policies to spaces that make sense in terms of management of action whilst also allowing relevant stakeholders to achieve a better efficiency of policy and funds. From this point of view, there is no real difference between soft spaces and territory. Nevertheless, that does not mean that territory, considered as a 'container', is not taken into account in EU discourses on territory. On the contrary, as mentioned above (section 2), the variable geometry of the concept allows each individual actor to recognize their own territory including the relevant institutional ones.

The concept of soft space appears then to be more a theoretical choice from the outset, than a choice related to the real functioning of space that necessarily combines 'hard' and 'soft' kind of spaces. It can be related to expressions in spatial terms which incorporate New Public Management approaches into spatial planning and development. New Public Management seeks to minimize any difference in nature between public and private management, giving particular importance to the ideas of efficiency and the evaluation of public policies. However, if private organizations can aim for profitability by focusing only on customer segments, public services are aimed at all citizens. It follows, that, the soft spaces represent an additional step in the application of New Public Management to the administrative network of the Member States. With this new stage, the scope of action, which traditionally defines European public law as the framework for applying a policy, becomes, in turn, an adjustable variable. However, no one (or almost no one) disputes the need to adapt the perimeters of action regularly to the realities of spatial development; as notably evidenced by the recent metropolitan 'reforms' in Europe. This is a completely different approach when it comes to modulating administrative rules within the same territorial level, which is the case with the 'right to differentiation'. For example, in a draft revision of the French constitution tabled in 2018<sup>6</sup>, this term, when applied to the action of local and regional authorities, meant two things:

- the possibility for local/regional authorities to have powers that are not available to all authorities in their category;
- the capacity given to local/regional authorities to derogate, in a sustainable way, and not only on an experimental basis, from certain national regulations.

In both cases, it is a question of inserting some kind of diversity into the organization and exercise of communities' powers.

6 On behalf of the Delegation to Local Authorities and Decentralization, two French MPs wrote a report 'on the possibilities opened up by the inclusion in the Constitution of a right to differentiation'. This followed the tabling of a constitutional bill by the government on May 9th 2018 (National Assembly, information report n° 1687).

The Janus God of the right to differentiation allows the flexibility of institutional regulations on the one hand, and, on the other hand, promotes the construction of an institutional territory with tailor-made responsibilities. Soft spaces are part of both New Public Management from the point of view of management and of the right to differentiation from an institutional point of view. Consequently, even in this approach, the institutional dimension of space is not absent as it is incorporated into the ways in which the EU speaks about territory. Territory as a social construct allows one to consider that actions in space are fundamentally based on the values of society. This enables us to move on from the debate on the efficiency of spatial planning actions, strongly related to the soft-space approach, to that on the choice of values of a given society that underpin actions in space. That is why it is important to try to define the concept of territory in a more in-depth manner which incorporates literature dating back to the 1980s and 1990s which provides a much more nuanced and complex understanding of space than that posited by the 'soft – hard' space dichotomy.

## 6. If 'Territory' Is Something It Should Be Possible to Define It

While the results of empirical studies mobilising the notion of soft spaces show that spatial reality is more complex than a mere dichotomy between these new 'soft' planning spaces and traditional, institutional spaces (Allmendinger et al., 2014), they emphasise the opposition which exists between these two manners of considering space in general, and planning space in particular. However, there is in fact no contradiction between these different ways of apprehending spaces so long as a constructivist conception of territory is maintained (Santamaria and Elissalde, 2018). A definition of this nature incorporates the political and administrative dimensions of space as dimensions that are important, but not exclusive, in the composition of spaces.

Stating that territory is a social construct can be considered as a truism. It is equally banal to acknowledge that soft spaces can become hard ones. That is why we consider the territory as a 'syncretic' concept which allows a consideration of the coexistence, within the same spaces, of relations between various elements of the territorial construction that cannot be reduced to a mere dichotomy between soft space and hard space. Such an approach, derived from French literature from the 1980s and 1990s (See Box 1) and some Italian authors (Dematteis, 1985), implies that no spatial delimitations of a territory can be identified from the outset. A territory is not an identifiable object if one does not also consider the experiences, representations, practices and spatial strategies of the actors within it. From this constructivist perspective, territorial configurations give sense ('semiotization') to a space that is gradually 'interpreted' and transformed to become a territory; 'by concrete or symbolic appropriation of space, actors territorialize the space' (Raffestin, 1986, p.181). This semiotic process is the result of a systemogenesis (Durand-Dastes and Sanders, 2005) through which actors, their representations, their values, and the structuring elements of the organization of the space interact. Limits, nodes, and networks are the structuring elements of the organization of the space in the sense that all human societies have used them, but each human society uses them differently in terms of intensity and configuration. This generates malleability and adaptations of certain territories that have become obsolete. This is valid not only with regards to those who develop reforms of territorial organisation, but also for those who organize spatial planning projects on the basis of soft spaces. The actors who participate in the functioning of a territory are endowed with strategic capacities. From this ensue the territorial dynamics ('territorialisation', 'de-territorialisation') and the necessary adjustments between the formal legal framework and the real socio-spatial dynamics.

The recent ESPON COMPASS project (ESPON, 2018), which proposes a categorisation of regional governance arrangements, echoes this last point in observing that many countries are looking for new spatial and institutional delineations to better adapt to spatial management and planning issues. It mentions, among others, several types of reconfigurations of levels of administrative unit:

- simplification of the administrative system instigated by national governments (Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Italy);
- addition or restoration of an administrative layer or of a level of power (e.g. the Greater London Authority)
- local public administrations, without an assembly, elected on the basis of direct universal suffrage, established by municipalities to deal with spatially relevant municipal tasks and services, which one single municipality may find difficult to provide (e.g. Finland, the Netherlands, and France).

The characteristics of soft spaces identified by Walsh et al. (2012) – new formal structures, local or sub-regional initiatives, corporate spatial planning, fuzzy boundaries, bottom up functional relations – thus *in fine* correspond to moments of temporary instability and re-composition in the relationships that exist between components in a given space. An approach of this type makes it possible to draw away from a view in which the regulatory dimension of policies and legal rulings is almost totally dismissed as mere inertia.

Box 1 - The Emergence of the Contemporary Meaning of the Notion of Territory in French Language Literature

The emergence of the contemporary meaning of the notion of territory in French language literature was used as a catalyst to various intellectual currents. From this, the notion became consensual. For researchers who were involved in spatial analysis, looking for factors and structures, the systemic approach of a territory allowed the various components of a territory to be taken into account and their relative importance to be tested. For researchers involved in 'social geography', the notion of territory was a way to consider the relations between social groups within a given space, and to take elements that ensure a general regulation into account, as well as a means by which to assess how places influence behaviours. Finally, for geographers interested in perception, the notion of territory allows a consideration of how imagination influences the action of groups. These themes, developed by a number of authors (Raffestin, 1980; Ferrier, 1984; Frémont et al., 1984; Le Berre, 1992) were encompassed in this notion of territory, which carries no definite scale but may refer to an area, a place, a region, a neighbourhood, and so on, as long as a social group recognizes it, and is associated to it. For the French geographer Di Méo (1998), territory thus refers to a mode of organisation and a dividing-up of space which ensures the specificity, the regulation, and the reproduction of the human groups occupying it. Territory thus belongs to the social space, but is also linked to 'lived-in' space. It belongs at once to the domain of objectification, because the social space concerns places organised by characteristic social and spatial relationships, and also to the realm of the subjective, because territory is also a 'lived-in' space. As such, territory expresses the existential relationship, necessarily subjective, that groups establish with their living environment. Territory, conceived in this way as a spatial entity to apprehend relationships between spaces and societies, places the notion of appropriation at the heart of the debate. This appropriation can be political, social, economic, ideological, imaginary, and so forth. It can be manifested in the form of ideas or in concrete manner, and it endows territory with the characteristics of a social construct, rather than of a 'given' provided *a priori* by natural elements, or other elements assumed to be unchanging. Territorial construction is an on-going process which enables an understanding of the dynamics of relationships between spaces and societies. Appropriation is effected by players who have a degree of awareness of themselves, and who have some representation of what their living environment, and hence the territory they occupy, should be. This is valid whichever society is concerned, whatever the era, the latitude, or the continent. This conception makes it possible to place the emphasis on the voluntary and intentional nature of the functioning of a territory. It enables the introduction of the logics of different players (citizens, politicians, entrepreneurs, planning professionals, etc.), their practices, and their representations, into the analysis of the functioning of a geographical entity. The players have skills and competences (strategic, legislative, argumentative, and so forth) and there is coherence in their behaviours.

Territory can also manifest itself in a brutal way. It then constitutes a new context, whether we want it to, or not, for planning and development actions. Indeed, as a social construct involving actors with a certain identity and a certain representation of the world and of their place in the space concerned, the concept of territory is not immune to instrumentalisation of identities linked to a given territory by the development of particularisms, and not only at a national scale. The territory and its scalar indifference is potentially the bearer of communitarian approaches. This suggests exclusive use of the space concerned. The unit of reference is not the individual but the group (and its social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other affiliation). The exclusive use is in a logic of competition for supposedly rare goods. This exclusivity is most often collective, based on concrete but limited groups. It can come from strictly material or functional reasons, but also from more directly social, ideological, or religious reasons. There are many examples, ranging from the effects of the Not-In-My-Back-Yard syndrome to the erection of walls on borders. Reference to the territory can serve as a support

for demands to get out of the national framework while clinging to the EU (Catalonia), to remain within the EU against centrifugal forces (Scotland versus 'Brexit'), or to get out of the European framework (the promotion of regional or national 'characteristics': Northern League in Italy, the situation in Hungary).

The political-administrative dimension of a space is not then antagonistic to the formation of more 'uncertain' spaces undergoing the vagaries of economic, political and social evolutions, but is, concomitantly, a structuring element, and one projection amongst others by societies on their spaces at a given moment. Of course, political and administrative constructions are forms of organisation of space that often have a certain duration, or even a degree of inertia. They cannot however be discounted from any analysis which seeks to give an account of all the dimensions and dynamics that contribute to the organisation of space – including for the purpose of adjusting planning and development policies to make these operate more efficiently. Political and administrative constructions also enable the spatial dynamics in play to be apprehended, and thus a consideration of the planning challenges faced by the territory they define.

The reflection on the notion of territory presented here shows how it can be used as a methodological tool for analysis that enables the real-life characteristics and dynamics of a space to be considered. It can also be useful in analysing EU space and in thinking about spatial planning at this scale, perhaps offering a path of return to the ambitions that led to the development of the ESDP.

## 7. Concluding Remarks: Back to the ESDP - the EU as a Territory and Not Just a Space

The initial aim of EEC regional policy in relation to the Preamble of the Treaty of Rome (1957) was to 'reduce the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions'. Even if this goal was rarely implemented progressively, it was the basis of the development of European regional policy, at least until the 2007-2013 EU Structural Funds programme, which was partly dedicated to supporting the competitiveness of all EU regions. Likewise, with the adoption of the ESDP, the ambition of having a spatial scheme that gave coherence and purpose to the various initiatives and actions of the EU was real and was discussed in the literature on the Europeanisation of spatial planning (see amongst others Dühr and Nadin, 2007; Dühr et al., 2007; Waterhout, 2007; Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Waterhout et al., 2009; Cotella and Rivolin, 2011). This perspective was in line with the first writings on the interest of thinking about planning at the scale of the European construction. Indeed, as Williams noted in 1996 (p.97):

Most local planners have a clear sense of the location within national space of the place for which they are responsible, often without thinking consciously about it. The capacity to conceptualise or think about one's location or situation within the spatial structure of Europe as a whole is a skill, which often needs to be developed.

Consequently, it is necessary to have a good knowledge of the structure and characteristics of EU space to be able to think about one's position within this space. From this point of view, the concept of territory as defined in this article can support a consideration of the territorial diversity of Europe. Both in institutional and functional terms and in discerning the bigger picture of the whole EU space.

The concept of territory can identify processes or elements that can contribute to the constitution of an 'EU territory'. Naturally this 'territory' is composed of many individual territories which can make it difficult to identify the various components of what could 'make' a territory. One way to overcome this difficulty would be to consider a set of nested territories - which would still have to be identified - on the same plane, resulting, if necessary, in the constitution of a larger territorial entity, a territory of regional integration (Santamaria, 2018).

Presently, some initiatives do exist aimed at developing better knowledge of the 'territory' of the EU, such as the ESPON programme. However, the ambitions to think about planning and development at EU scale have all but disappeared. In this context, territory is still today only, and somewhat regrettably, a notion that serves to adjust existing EU policies in the absence of political ambition for the development of the entire European area.

## References

- Allmendinger, Philip, Thomas Chilla and Fanziska Sielker (2014) Europeanizing territoriality: Towards soft spaces? *Environment and Planning A*, 46, pp.2703–2717.
- Barca, Fabrizio (2009) *Agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy. A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Baudelle, Guy, Catherine Guy and Bernadette Mérenne-Schoumaker (2011) *Le développement territorial en Europe. Concepts, enjeux et débats*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- Cotella, Giancarlo and Umberto Janin Rivolin (2011) Europeanization of spatial planning through discourse and practice in Italy. *disP – The Planning Review*, 186, pp.42-53.
- Dematteis, Giuseppe (1985) *Le metafore della Terra*. Milan: Feltrinelli.
- Di Méo, Guy (1998) *Géographie sociale et territoire*. Paris: Editions Nathan.
- Doucet, Philippe (2007) Cohésion territoriale de l'Union européenne. La gestation ambiguë d'un ambitieux projet politique. *Cahiers de l'urbanisme*, 64, pp.6-11.
- Drevet, Jean-François (2008) *Histoire de la politique régionale de l'Union européenne*. Paris: Belin.
- Dühr, Stephanie and Vincent Nadin (2007) Europeanization through transnational territorial cooperation? The case of INTERREG IIIB North-West Europe. *Planning Practice and Research*, 22 (3), pp.373-394.
- Dühr, Stephanie, Dominic Stead and Will Zonneveld (2007) The Europeanization of spatial planning through territorial cooperation. *Planning Practice and Research*, 22 (3), pp.291-307.
- Durand-Dastes, François and Lena Sanders (2005) Spatial system. *Hypergé*o [online] Available from: <http://www.hypergeo.eu/spip.php?article85> [Accessed 11 March 2019].
- Elissalde, Bernard, Frédéric Santamaria and Aude Peyralbes (2008) *Lexique de l'aménagement du territoire européen*. Paris: Lavoisier.
- Elissalde, Bernard, Frédéric Santamaria and Philippe Jeanne (2013) Harmony and melody in discourse on European Cohesion. *European Planning Studies*, 22, 3 [online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.782389> [Accessed 5 March 2020].
- ESPON (2007) *Application of the ESDP in the Member States*. Luxembourg: ESPON.
- ESPON (2012) *ESPON and Territorial Impact Assessment*. Luxembourg: ESPON.
- ESPON (2018) *Comparative analysis of territorial governance and spatial planning systems in Europe Final Report*. Luxembourg: ESPON.
- European Commission (1961) *Conférence sur les économies régionales*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- European Commission (2008) *Communication from the Commission to the Council. The European Parliament, The Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0616:FIN:EN:PDF>
- European Parliament (1983) *Report on a European Regional Planning Scheme*. Strasbourg: European Parliament.
- Evers, David (2012) A solution in search of a problem: A 'Garbage Can' approach to the politics of territorial cohesion, *European Journal of Spatial Development*, Refereed Article 45, <https://archive.nordregio.se/en/European-Journal-of-Spatial-Development/Refereed-articles/index.html>
- Faludi, Andreas (1997), A 'roving band of planners' according to Andreas Faludi's expression, A Roving Band of Planners. *Built Environment*, 23 (4), pp.281- 287.
- Faludi, Andreas (2001) The application of the European Spatial Planning Perspective: Evidence from the North-West Metropolitan Area. *European Planning Studies*, 9 (5), pp.663-675.
- Faludi, Andreas (2003) The application of the European Spatial Development Perspective: Introduction to a special issue. *Town and Country Planning Review*, 74 (1), pp.1-9.
- Faludi, Andreas (2007) Territorial Cohesion Policy and the European model of society. *European Planning Studies*, 15 (4), pp.567-583.
- Faludi, Andreas (2013) Territorial cohesion and subsidiarity under the European Union treaties: A critique of the 'territorialism' underlying. *Regional Studies*, 47, pp.1594-1606.
- Faludi, Andreas (2016) The poverty of territorialism: Revisiting European spatial planning. *Disp: The Planning Review*, 52, pp.73–81.
- Faludi, Andreas and Bas Waterhout (2002) *The making of the European Spatial Development Perspective. No Masterplan*. London: Routledge.

- Ferrier, Jean-Paul (1984) *Antée I. La géographie ça sert d'abord à parler du territoire, ou le métier du géographe*. Aix-en-Provence: Édisud.
- Frémont, Armand, Jacques Chevalier, Robert Hérim and Jean Renard (1984) *Géographie sociale*. Paris: Masson.
- Knieling, Joerg and Frank Othengrafen (eds) (2009) *Planning culture in Europe. Decoding cultural phenomena in urban and regional planning*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 239- 254.
- Le Berre, Maryvonne (1992) Territoire. In Bailly Antoine, Robert Ferras and Denise Pumain (eds) *Encyclopédie de la Géographie*. Paris: Economica, pp.617-638.
- Perkmann, Markus (2007) Construction of new territorial scale: A framework and case study of the EUREGIO cross-border région. *Regional Studies*, 41 (2), pp.253-266.
- Purkarthofer, E. (2018) *Understanding Europeanisation from within: The interpretation, implementation and instrumentalisation of European Spatial Planning in Austria and Finland*. Aalto University. doi: 978-952-60-8268-4.
- Raffestin, Claude (1980) *Pour une géographie du pouvoir*. Paris: LITEC.
- Raffestin, Claude (1986) Ecogénèse territoriale et territorialité. In Auriac Franck and Roger Brunet (eds) *Espaces, jeux et enjeux*. Paris: Fayard, pp.175-185.
- Santamaria, Frédéric (2009) *Le Schéma de développement de l'espace communautaire (SDEC) : application défailante ou élaboration problématique ? Cybergeog: European Journal of Geography*, 458, [online] Available from: <http://www.cybergeog.eu/index22354.html> [Accessed 11 March 2019].
- Santamaria, Frédéric (2018) Territoire. In Mareï, Nora and Yann Richard (eds) *Dictionnaire de la régionalisation du monde*. Neuilly: Atlante, pp.204-207.
- Santamaria, Frédéric and Bernard Elissalde (2018) Territory as a way to move on from the aporia of soft/hard space. *Town Planning Review*, 89 (1), pp.43-60.
- Stead, Dominic (2014) European integration and spatial rescaling in the Baltic region: Soft spaces, soft planning and soft security. *European Planning Studies*, 22, pp.680-693.
- Torre, André (2015) Théorie du développement territorial. *Géographie, économie, société*, 17 (3), pp.273-288.
- Walsh, Cormac, Marta Jacuniak-Suda, Jörg Knieling and Frank Othengrafen (2012) 'Soft spaces in spatial planning and governance: theoretical reflections and definitional issues' (unpublished paper), Delft, Regional Studies Association European Conference.
- Waterhout, Bas (2007) Episodes of Europeanisation of Dutch National Planning, *Planning Practice and Research*, 22 (3), pp.309-327.
- Waterhout, Bas, João Mourato and Kai Böhme (2009) The Impact of Europeanisation on Planning Cultures. In Knieling, Joerg and Frank Othengrafen (eds) *Planning culture in Europe. Decoding cultural phenomena in urban and regional planning*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp.239-254.
- Williams, Richard H. (1996) *European Union spatial policy and planning*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.