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EU GOVERNANCE AND EU COHESION POLICY: REFLEXIVE ADAPTATION OR INCONSISTENT COORDINATION?

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Abstract

The paper discusses the co-evolution of the EU mode of governance and the objectives of European Union cohesion policy. As EU integration proceeds, collective decision-making in an increasingly diverse political arena has become a central concern for research on EU governance. The literature on experimentalist governance suggests consensus-seeking deliberation and policy-experimentation as two key mechanisms to reduce the trade-off between overall policy responsiveness and democratic legitimacy. However, this paper argues that the inconsistencies which result from making cohesion policy deliver the Lisbon Agenda and EU 2020 objectives growth are a characteristic of meta-governance rather than of reflexive adaptation. These findings emerge from an analysis of the cohesion policy programming periods since 1988 and the parallel developments in European Union governance.

Keywords

Governance, cohesion policy, diversity, production of space.

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1. European Integration, Governance, and the Production of Space

Since the "Big Bang" of the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, the economic disparities between European Union Member States have become larger than those between states in the United States (Majone, 2005). Thus, with regards to EU cohesion policy (Adams, Alden, and Harris, 2006), the eastern enlargement poses a challenge to the objective of 'reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions' (Treaty for the Functioning of the European Union [TFEU], Art. 174). Furthermore, with regard to the local level, it has been argued that socio-spatial polarisation has become a "striking feature" of the settlement system, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Lang, 2011, 2012). Similarly, the Commission report Employment and Social Development in Europe (2013) found that the trend towards decreasing regional disparities has been brought to a halt by the recent financial crisis (cited by Nathigal, 2014, p.14).

This paper investigates the link between European integration, the mode of European Union governance and the production of space. Viewed from the perspective of Stein Rokkan's (1999) theory of boundary building and political structuring, political systems can be understood as being structured by a membership boundary and a territorial boundary. The relative openness of these boundaries conditions the structuring of the internal political system. Therefore, enlargement of the European Union can be expected to have a discernible structuring effect on its governance.

The paper argues that, in the context of a politically and economically increasingly integrated Europe, the emergence of new modes of governance (Marks et al., 1996; Heritier and Rhodes, 2011) is driven by the need to achieve efficient and legitimate problem-solving among the increasingly politically and socially diverse Member States, and across multiple spatial scales. In other words, the objective is to improve both the input and output legitimacy (Scharpf, 1997) of the European Union or, more modestly, to 'reduce the trade-off between overall responsiveness and democratic participation' (de Burca, Keohane, and Sabel, 2014, p.15) of the polity. While some authors (de Burca, Keohane, and Sabel, 2014; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008, 2010; Zeitlin and Vanhercke, 2014) are optimistic about the potential of new experimentalist forms of governance, others have pointed to the weaknesses of open forms of coordination (Scharpf, 2002; Smismans, 2008) and warned against the implications for the functioning of the traditional representative model of democracy (Bellamy and Kröger, 2011; Bevir, 2010). While these debates touch upon more abstract theoretical issues, the concrete question of this paper is how the mode of governance influences the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). Empirical evidence on this topic seems inconclusive. While Zeitlin and Vanhercke (2014) argue that experimentalist governance boosts the social component of the EU 2020 strategy, Avdikos and Chardas (2015) have criticised the polarising socio-spatial consequences of making cohesion policy deliver EU 2020 objectives.

Indeed, aspirations of becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world (the Lisbon Agenda) through smart, inclusive and sustainable growth (the EU 2020 strategy) seem to prioritise economic over social objectives, or suggest that the attainment of the latter depends on the success of the former. As structural funds constitute roughly one third of the European Union's budget, it is not surprising that they have been identified by the Commission as 'key delivery mechanisms to achieve the priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Member States and regions' (European Commission, 2010, p.21). Nevertheless, this puts into question what "cohesion" actually means, tilting the balance between redistribution and growth decidedly to the latter (Avdikos and Chardas, 2015).

The paper argues that the alignment of the growth-focused EU 2020 strategy with the redistribution-oriented cohesion policy appears as a rebalancing the "competitive Europe" and the "social Europe" strategies in the aftermath of the Eastern European enlargement. While the causes of this rebalancing can be found in the increasing diversity of Member States' interests rather than in the inconsistency of the experimentalist meta-governance itself, the emerging mode of governance appears, as of now, incapable of effectively mitigating these fault-lines. This is exemplified by the fact that dissent persists over how to address the urgent task of bringing the implementation of the reformed post-2013 cohesion policy up to speed. Rather than attempting to reach consensus on immediate solutions, the debates tend to displace the issue into the post-2020 programming period, putting their hopes into further major structural reforms.

The paper is divided into two parts. The next section discusses the relation between European integration and the structuring of governance, arguing that EU cohesion policy can be seen as embedded in an increasingly experimentalist form of multi-level meta-governance. In the subsequent section, the development of the spatial selectivity of EU cohesion policy is discussed, suggesting that making cohesion policy a delivery vehicle of the EU 2020 strategy is conducive to prioritising competitiveness and efficiency objectives over cohesion. This is expected to translate into a spatial selectivity, where support of competitive spaces is more important than assisting backward regions. Finally, the paper concludes by indicating some points of interest for future research.

2. New Modes of Governance: Cohesion Policy to Deliver EU 2020?

This section investigates the link between European integration and the emergence of new modes of governance. In view of the available budget and the political objectives of EU cohesion policy, it is remarkable that there seems to exist no agreement on its effectiveness (Molle, 2007, Ch.10; Leonardi, 2005, p.92). However, the paper is not questioning the rationale of creating a policy to alleviate socio-spatial disparities across the European Union. Indeed, it can be argued that the widening of the socio-spatial disparities across the European Union in the aftermath of the repeated enlargements and due to the effects of the recent financial/sovereign debt crises, reinforces the need for a European-wide redistribution mechanism, from an economic (global competitiveness), political (legitimacy), and normative perspective (solidarity, equity). It is, however, argued that the current mode of governance of the European Union is contributing to pushing cohesion policy towards a growth-promoting rationale, which is likely to make it less effective in alleviating socio-spatial inequality.[1]

The argument in a nutshell: in the absence of a European demos that would lend democratic legitimacy to European Union policy-making, interest representation at the European level is one of the main legitimising mechanism of European Union integration (Majone, 2005). Due to a multiplication of political and social systems, and hence an increase of national and regional actors and interests, European Union enlargements are likely to aggravate collective action dilemmas under the community method.[2] This has encouraged the emergence of new – and increasingly experimentalist – modes of governance, which generally either attempt to accommodate plurality, like the open method of coordination (Borrás and Jacobsson, 2004; Smismans, 2008), or restrict the number of players (often to selected elites), as for example in the informal Eurogroup deliberations (Puetter, 2006a). Critics have argued that these attempts to square the circle of overall responsiveness vs democratic participation are premised on logically flawed or overly optimistic assumptions about the relationship between efficiency and inclusiveness (Peters and Pierre, 2004; Scharpf, 2002; Smismans, 2008). Broadly speaking, their contention is that these new governance practices are characteristic of a "post-political" way of consensus-seeking, wherein conflicting interests are seen as a managerial rather than political challenge (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001; Metzger, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck, 2015a; Mouffe, 2005).

2.1. EU Enlargement, Interest Representation and New Modes of Governance

Majone (2005) argues that that overly optimistic expectations about the prospects of European Union integration have led to a pro-integration bias that prioritises institutional interest representation over problem-solving in the institutional architecture of the European Union. The problem is that the essentially open-ended nature of European integration is rendering the emergence of a robust European demos unlikely and, thus, poses a significant challenge to the consolidation of one particular mode of policy-making. Over the last decade, attempts to reach consensus on the future development of European integration under conditions of increased diversity and uncertainty have resulted in a shift towards simultaneously more open, more informal, more experimentalist and more deliberative practices of governance.

1 For the Visegrad coutries, Medve-Bálint (2014) argues that cohesion policy exacerbates these inequalities as funds tend to get concentrated in the most developed regions – though for different reasons.

2 However, Veen (2011) found that the 2004 enlargement had no significant effect on the efficiency of decision-making in the Council

However, there seems to be little agreement on the consequences of these practices of governance. On the one hand, these practices can be seen as attempts to accommodate diversity by creating channels of interest representation (Bartolini, 2005; Rokkan, 1999), with the objective of increasing the input legitimacy of European Union policy-making. Accordingly, the European Union's practice of policy coordination and learning through "trial-and-error" strategies and feedback-mechanisms has been seen as evidence of a new experimentalist governance architecture (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2010) that has a positive impact on the social dimension of European Union policy-making (Zeitlin and Vanhercke, 2014). Additionally, other authors observe a trend towards a consensus-seeking deliberative (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003) intergovernmentalism (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter, 2014; Puetter, 2012) which may circumvent the inflexibilities of the official European Union institutional architecture by referring to informal governance practices (Puetter, 2006a). On the other hand, critics maintain that while these practices may improve the representation of some interests at the European level, it is not clear whether they contribute to more efficient problem-solving. Peters and Pierre (2004), for example, view the informalisation of governmental functions in multi-level governance arrangements as a Faustian bargain, whereby democratic accountability and political control are traded for seemingly more efficient governance solutions. Indeed, one of the most eminent theoreticians of European governance now seems to be rather wary that the representation of the interests of a continuously growing number of Member States may, in the absence of a European demos, lead to a democratic default (Majone, 2005, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). Moreover, doubt has been cast on the problem-solving capacity of participatory governance (Heinelt et al., 2002; Smismans, 2008).

What emerges from this debate is that the multiplication of interests as a consequence of European Union enlargement seems to have led to a transformation of the political process of European Union policy-making. This development lends renewed salience to the question: "What is politics" (Satori, 1973) and what is "the political" (Metzger, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck, 2015b, pp.8-10; Mouffe, 2005), especially as blatant disagreement persists over the implications of this transformation. The next section will argue that the alignment of cohesion policy with the EU 2020 strategy is a result of these transformations.

2.2. Towards Post-Political Governance? Aligning EU Cohesion Policy and EU 2020

European Commission increasingly portraits cohesion policy as a delivery mechanism of the EU 2020 strategy:

> Cohesion policy and its structural funds, while important in their own right, are key delivery mechanisms to achieve the priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in Member States and regions (European Commission, 2010, p.20).

To explain this alignment, it is useful to introduce some elements of Bob Jessop's strategic-relational approach (1990, 2004, 2007). From this perspective, the political-economy of capitalism is based on two major social relations: the capital relation and the state form. The precarious articulation of these relations determines the *strategic selectivity* of the political system by privileging 'particular social forces, interests, and actors over others' in their choice of specific state strategies and state projects (Jessop, 1990, cited by Brenner, 2004, p.87).

On the one hand, *state projects* are seen as initiatives that endow state institutions with organisational coherence, functional coordination, and operational unity' (Jessop, 1990, cited by Brenner, 2004, p.88). In other words, they produce a "state effect". For the purpose of the present paper, state projects are equivalent to the mode of governance. On the other hand, state strategies are those initiatives which 'mobilize state institutions in order to promote particular forms of socio-economic intervention' (Jessop, 1990, cited by Brenner, 2004, p.88). In other words, they can be seen as "hegemonic projects" or policy paradigms. For the present paper, the Lisbon Agenda and the Europe 2020 strategy are treated as state strategies. Equipped with these conceptual tools, we can begin to explain the alignment of European Union cohesion policy with the EU 2020 strategy.

The paper has argued in Section 2.1 that the new practices of governance in the European Union emerge from attempts to reduce the trade-off between interest representation and efficient problem-solving. Therefore, in an analogy with Jessop's concept of state projects, the search for new practices of governance that aim at resolving this dilemma can be seen as the political project of the European Union. As such, the "key issue" of EU governance is

> the manner and extent to which the multiplying levels, arenas and regimes of politics, policy making, and policy implementation can be endowed with a certain apparatus and operational unity horizontally and vertically; and how this affects the overall operation of politics and the legitimacy of the new political arrangements (Jessop, 2004, p.73).

This mode of governance has respectively been coined as multi-level meta-governance (Jessop 2002, 2004) and experimentalist governance (de Burca, Keohane, and Sabel, 2014; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008, 2010, 2012; Zeitlin, 2015; Zeitlin and Vanhercke, 2014). According to Jessop (2004, p.66), multi-level meta-governance is the management of the complexity, plurality, and tangled hierarchies of existing modes of governance (see also Bache and Flinders, 2004b, p.97). Jessop (2004, p.72) nevertheless cautions that, in the last analysis, it is unrealistic to expect meta-governance not to fail in the face of growing complexity. Hence, an ironic approach – characterised by 'continuing experimentation, improvisation, and adaptation' – is proposed as a remedy. Multi-level meta-governance is characterised by an unstable equilibrium of compromise rather than by the systematic application of one method of coordination. While Jessop's account points out the potential inconsistencies of this mode of governance, the literature on experimentalist governance, maintains that an "iterative circle" (Sabel and Zeitlin, 2012) of learning based on continuous monitoring, feedback, peer review, and framework adaptation mitigates the problem of governance failure.

Table 1: Meta-Governance and Experimentalist Governance

	Meta-Governance	Experimentalist Governance
Premise	• Complexity • Open-ended coordination	• Complexity • Open-ended coordination
Process	• Experimentation, improvisation, adaptation	• Iterative circle (monitoring, feedback, peer review, adaptation)
Outcome	• Unstable equilibrium • Inconsistencies across different modes of coordination • Ultimately, policy failure	• Reflexive learning • Continuous re-evaluation of objectives and ways of attaining them • Reduced trade-off between responsiveness and participation
Attitude	• Irony	• Managerial

Source: Own compilation

Critics have, however, argued that the latter mode of experimentalist governance should be understood as "post-political", because inconsistencies between policy objectives are discursively erased. According to this perspective, the "political" is an arena in which actors struggle with each other in the pursuit of their (sometimes) *conflictive* interests, while respecting the general rules of the game. In the "post-political" situation interests are made *commensurable* by restructuring the arena and the rules under which interests encounter each other (Mouffe, 2005).

In this context, Erik Swyngedouw (2007) cautioned that post-political concepts and the political strategies they justify, while allegedly offering inclusive and efficient solutions, are in fact based on the logically flawed assumption of commensurable interests. Instead of truly open and deliberate reasoning, participatory modes of governance are often plagued by an 'elitism' in which 'fundamental political questions often curiously appear to have already been determined "somewhere else" on the basis of some "general interest" which no-one in his or her right mind can supposedly disagree with' (Metzger et al., 2015b, p.7). In turn, this framing of political objectives as unproblematic, according to Allmendinger and Haughton (2015, p.31) is leading to a 'blurring of institutional responsibilities, accountability and legitimacy'.

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) maintain that people's interests are rooted in their life worlds. This means that in socially highly stratified pluralist modern societies, a mechanism for temporarily ordering these conflicting interests is necessary in order to enable collective action. Laclau and Mouffe argue that this ordering of incommensurable interests can only occur in the political sphere. Furthermore, this ordering takes place through an antagonistic competition of ideas rather than through cooperation. However, as the convergence is interests is blocked by their rootedness in local experiences, clear rules of the game are necessary periodically to ensure the smooth transition from one set of temporarily hegemonic ideas to the next one. They disagree with proponents of a "Third Way", who argue that, with the end of communism and the emergence of the network society, antagonisms have disappeared. Specifically, they reject the idea that a 'politics without frontiers would now be possible – a "win-win politics" where solutions could be found that favoured everybody in society' because

this would imply 'that politics is no longer structured around social division, and that political problems have become merely technical' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp.xiv-xv). Laclau and Mouffe claim that the reality of an uneven distribution of power and the "ineradicability of antagonism" foreclose the possibility of a "deliberative democracy" in the sense of Habermas. In their view, there is no final resolution of conflict and/or reconciliation of divided interests through dialogue.

In short, these critics would probably concur with Bob Jessop that open-ended policy coordination is ultimately destined to produce inconsistent outcomes. The reason is that policy problems are rooted in the diverging life experiences of individuals within ever more pluralist modern societies and, therefore, managerial governance techniques are ultimately bound to fail in the attempt to overcome these differences. In Jessop's words, the inconsistencies in *political strategies* 'may be part of an overall self-organizing, self-adjusting practice of meta-governance within a complex division of government and governance powers' (2004, p.71).

The discussion has attempted to show that (in)consistencies between different political strategies are a function of the mode of governance. Hence, this paper maintains that the alignment of the growth- and competitiveness-focused EU 2020 strategy with the redistribution-focused cohesion policy reveals a background conflict over the hegemony of the competitive Europe vis-à-vis the social Europe political strategy (Faludi, 2010; Waterhout, 2008). With regard to the relationship between economic growth and social inclusion, the two strategies are premised on two incommensurable theoretical approaches. While the competitive Europe strategy assumes that in a globalising economy, economic growth (generally based on productivity growth) will eventually trickle down and lead to more social inclusion, the social Europe strategy postulates the inverse relation.[3] Significantly, the discursive reframing of the objectives of cohesion policy can be seen as an indirect way to reallocate cohesion policy resources to other political objectives, despite the 'near total absence of discretionary spending' (Moravcsik, 2005, p.32) at the European Union level. This is problematic in as far as it challenges the Treaty objective of economic, social and territorial cohesion (TFEU, Art. 174-178).

In sum, the increasing diversity of interests in the European Union triggered a search for a mode of governance that would reduce the trade-off between overall responsiveness and democratic participation. However, in terms of the prevalent *political strategies* it has been argued that the discursive reframing of conflicting interests as compatible can lead to inconsistent policy mixes. While the meta-governance approach holds that this result is inevitable and should be faced with an ironic attitude, proponents of experimentalist governance argue that the right managerial practices can solve this dilemma. These insights can be summarised in two hypotheses:

- If policy coordination leads to policy mixes which are characterised by *unintentional* negative effects on either one policy, the mode of governance is meta-governance. Meta-governance does not erase the contradictions between different political strategies.

  In the context of this paper, meta-governance would imply that the contradictions between the political strategies at the European level are *not* resolved, but managed in a way that displaces them temporally and spatially (Habermas, 1977; Harvey, 1982). Hence, making cohesion policy deliver the Lisbon Agenda and the EU 2020 strategy is expected to lead first, to less balanced growth; secondly, low competitiveness gains; and thirdly, calls for further major reform.
- If policy coordination leads to policy mixes which are characterised by the *desired* outcomes, the mode of governance is experimentalist governance. Experimentalist governance mitigates the contradictions between different political strategies.

  In the context of this paper, experimentalist governance would imply that the contradictions between the political strategies at the European level *are* resolved. Hence, making cohesion policy deliver the Lisbon Agenda and the EU 2020 strategy is expected to lead, first, to balanced growth; secondly, competitiveness gains; and thirdly, reflexive learning and incremental improvement within the existing framework.

3 If Council voting is an indicator of the major fault lines between the political strategies, the dividing line of this conflict lies roughly between the net-contributing and the net-receiving Member States (Veen, 2011). In other words, between older and newer Member States, as well as between the North and the South, and, increasingly, the West and the East (Naurin and Wallace, 2008)

3. The Spatial Selectivity of Cohesion Policy

This section looks at how the evolution of European Union political project and political strategies influence the spatial selectivity of cohesion policy. The argument put forth is that the tendency toward post-political consensus formation at the European Union level conceals the reality of socio-spatial polarisation by discursively obscuring the conflict between the competitiveness objectives of the EU 2020 strategy and the equity objectives of cohesion policy. Making cohesion policy a key delivery instrument of the EU 2020 strategy is likely to divert the cohesion policy rationale from redistribution to lagging regions towards an increased spatial concentration of socio-economic activities in spaces that are relevant for the competitiveness of the single market (Avdikos and Chardas, 2015).

3.1. Spatial Selectivity

The above discussion has argued that making cohesion policy deliver EU 2020 objectives entails the alignment of two rather incompatible political strategies – competitive Europe and social Europe. According to Neil Brenner, state space and its development should be understood as the spatial expressions of such political strategies (Brenner, 2004, Ch.3; see also Harrison, 2010; Heley, 2013; Raco, 2009). In an analogy with strategic selectivity, *spatial selectivity* 'refers to the processes of "spatial privileging and articulation" through which state policies are differentiated across territorial space in order to target particular geographical zones and scales' (Jones, 1997, cited by Brenner, 2004, p.89).

Making reference to Harvey (1982), Brenner suggests that, while state institutions may be equipped with a spatial selectivity that helps to displace capitalism's inherent contradictions temporally, this outcome is not pre-given. Instead, he contends that 'insofar as state institutions may also be harnessed in ways that exacerbate uneven spatial development, they may seriously exacerbate, rather than displace, capital's endemic crisis-tendencies and contradictions' (Brenner, 2004, p.96). In other words, the degree of socio-spatial polarisation within a polity is not pre-determined, but a function of the prevailing political strategies.

To conceptualise the evolution of spatial selectivity, Brenner formulates a set of parameters. He develops a two-by-two diagram in which he distinguishes *state spatial project* and *state spatial strategy* along a scalar dimension and a territorial dimension (see Table 2). The four cells, he argues, contain some of the 'core tensions;' as well as the 'scale and area-specific patterns of state territorial organisation and state spatial intervention that may emerge through such struggles' (Brenner, 2004, p.98).

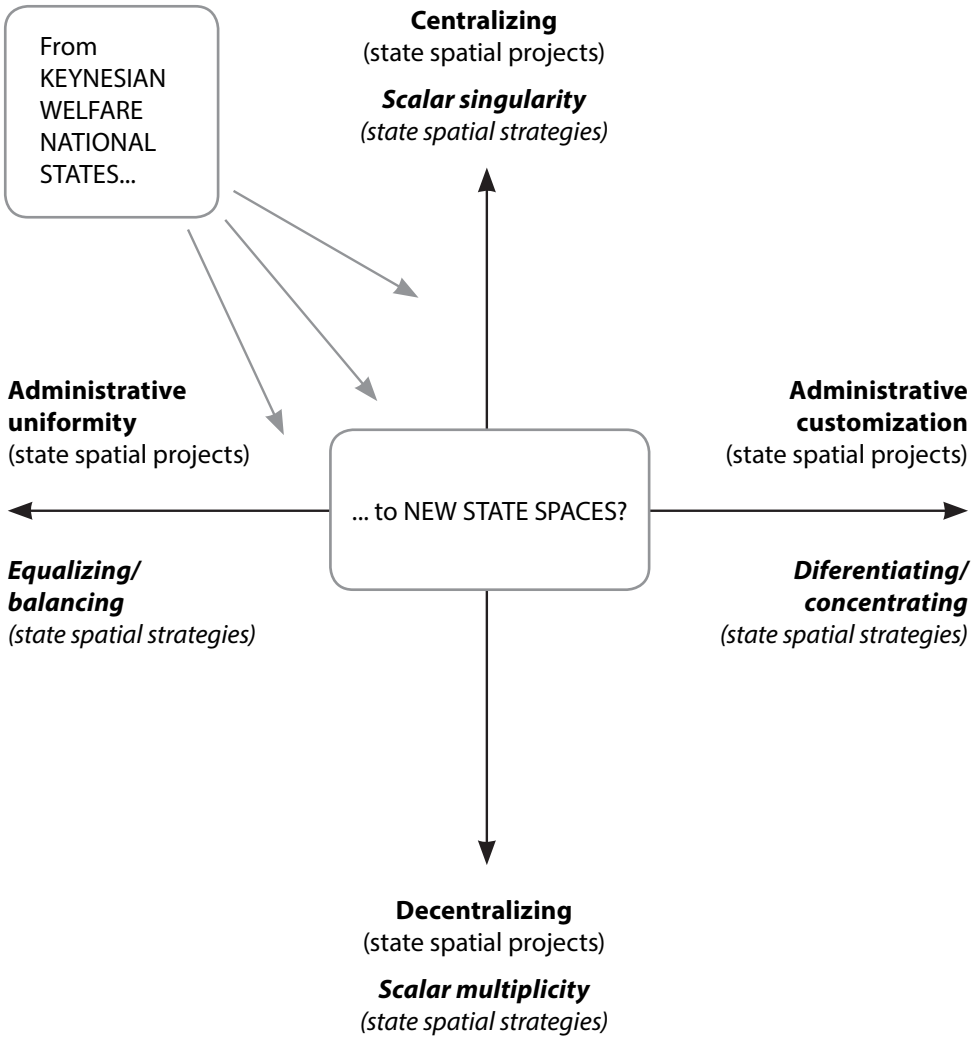
Table 2: State Spatial Projects and State Spatial Strategies

	STATE SPATIAL PROJECTS **Geographies of state territorial organisation and administrative differentiation within a given territory**	**STATE SPATIAL STRATGIES** **Geographies of state intervention into socio-economic life within a given territory**
SCALAR DIMENSION	(1) Centralisation vs Decentralisation	(3) Singularity vs Multiplicity
TERRITORIAL DIMENSION	(2) Uniformity vs Customisation	(4) Equalisation vs Concentration

Source: Based on Brenner (2004, p.97)

Each cell contains two polar alternatives for the spatial selectivity of the state. Building on this conceptualisation, Brenner subsequently develops a four-dimensional matrix, indicating the likely evolution of the state spatial selectivity (see Figure 1). Importantly, Brenner asserts that, in the period from World War II until the late 1970s, the (1) state spatial projects were oriented toward centralisation and administrative uniformity, while (2) state spatial strategies were oriented toward scalar singularity (the national) and the territorial balancing of socio-economic activities. Following Jessop (1990, 2002), this type of state is characterised as the Keynesian welfare national state.

In Jessop's view, this state form is currently being superseded by a new type of state – the Schumpeterian competition state. This path-dependent process, Brenner (2004, pp.105-106) hypothesises, involves the reorientation of, first, state spatial projects 'toward administrative differentiation and decentralisation'; and, secondly, state spatial strategies 'toward the differentiation of socio-economic activities within a national territory and toward the management of scalar multiplicity'. According to Brenner, this process has resulted in the emergence of 'new state spaces' with urban regions becoming the primary spaces of accumulation within the 'rescaled competition state regime'[4] (Brenner, 2004, p.295). In Figure 1, these developments constitute the movement of spatial selectivity from the top left to the bottom right corner. This model will be used to study the evolution of the spatial selectivity of cohesion policy from 1988 to the post-2014 reforms.



Vertical axis	scalar articulation of state institutions and policies
Horizontal axis	territorial articulation of state institutions and policies
Regular font	generic spatial features of the Keynesian welfare national state
Italicised font	hypothised spatial features of emergent, post-10970s state forms

Figure 1: The Evolution of State Spatial Selectivity
Source: Based on Brenner (2004, p.106)

4 Brenner, Peck, and Theodore (2010) have described this transformation as "variegated neoliberalisation", where the logic of the capital relation is seen to have become more dominant relative to the capacity of the state to implement socio-political objectives. In this view, the uneven regulatory development under the neoliberal regime is a constitutive part of neoliberalisation.

3.2. The Development of the Spatial Selectivity of Cohesion Policy

The table below (see Table 3) shows how the objectives and instruments of cohesion policy have evolved between 1988 and 2013. While a continuous growth of the available funds can be observed throughout the entire period, two periods can clearly be identified in terms of the structure and objectives of cohesion policy. The first period (1988-1999) includes two programming periods (1989-1993 and 1994-1999), which are structurally virtually identical. By contrast, in the second period (2000-2013), each of the two programming periods were characterised by reforms in preparation (2000-2006) and in reaction (2007-2013) to the enlargements. Finally, the alignment of cohesion policy with the EU 2020 strategy in the post-2013 period indicate the shifted balance between the competitive Europe and the social Europe political strategies. However, contrary to the expectations of experimentalist governance, the result is an "unstable equilibrium", rather than the desired outcome of smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth.

Table 3: Development of Cohesion Policy; Evolution of Objectives and Distribution of Funds (billions of euro) by Objective, 1988–2020

1988-93		1994-99	2000-06		2007-13		2014-2020	
Objective	**Amount**	**Amount**	**Objective**	**Amount**	**Objective**	**Amount**	**Objective**	**Amount**
Lagging	43	102	Lagging	136	Convergence (and competitiveness)	251	Less Developed	179.1
Restructuring	9	22	Restructuring	23	Regional competitiveness and employment	49	Transition	35.9
Unemployment	8	15	Social (former unemployment and Social)	24			More developed	56.7
Social								
Ultra-peripheral							Outermost and sparsely populated regions	1.6
Other programmes							Cohesion Fund	63.4
Community initiative programmes	5	11	INERREG URBAN EQUAL LEADER Etc.	1 10 1	Territorial cooperation	8	Territorial cooperation	10.1
Adaptation to EMU conditions		10	EMU	18				
							Youth unemployment initiative	3.2
Total resource	**65 ECU**	**159 ECU**		**€ 213**		**€ 308**		**€ 351.8**

Source: Based on Molle (2007, p.143) for 1988-2013 and cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu for 2014-2020

The paper suggests that the reasons for this shift lie in the impact of continued European Union enlargements on, first, the relative power and interests of net-contributors and net-receivers and the Commission; secondly, the increased diversity of interests among the Member States, which seek accommodation in a new compromise; and thirdly, the capacity to design a consistent policy in a context of an increased number of veto-positions. In sum, these developments had a structuring effect on the *European Union political project* (mode of governance), the *European Union political strategy* (competitive Europe vs social Europe), and the *European Union spatial strategy* (as expressed in the evolution of cohesion policy).

In other words, the argument is that the greater diversity of interests and reshuffled power relations helped the emergence of a post-political mode of experimentalist/meta-governance, in which the incompatible objectives of the competitive Europe and the social Europe strategies are reframed as mutually supportive. As such, the rationale of cohesion policy has somewhat shifted away from delivering economic, social, and territorial cohesion.

3.2.1. Launch and Relative Stability (1988-1999)

In terms of Brenner's model, the *political project* (mode of governance) during this early period can be described as "integration through regulation" (Majone, 1996), wherein the central position of the community level is ensured by the dominance of the community method of integration (centralisation). Characteristic of this approach to integration is the reliance on general purpose legislation and treaty modification (administrative uniformity). While the Single European Act of 1986 introduced the cooperation procedure and extended qualified majority voting in an attempt to remove barriers to further harmonisation (administrative customisation), to this day these are not applied to cohesion policy. However, as the example of the Mediterranean countries' influence in shaping the single market strategy will indicate, the increasing diversity of the European polity resulted in a modification of the single market *political strategy*.[5]

Indeed, the development of cohesion policy has always been closely connected to the process of European integration and, in particular, to the creation of the single market (Manzella and Mendez, 2009). After a period of relative stagnation in the 1970s and early 1980s, the single market programme (*political strategy*) and the accession of the less competitive Mediterranean countries became important triggers of the 1988 reform, which ushered in a 'new era' for cohesion policy (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p.13). As a counterweight to balance the negative effects of market integration, the establishment of a supranational redistribution mechanism – this Europeanisation of cohesion policy – has been called a 'revolutionary change' (Leonardi, 2005, p.1). In other words, the *political strategy* of market integration was met by the opposition of the less developed Mediterranean Member States, which were successful in pushing their interest in a supranational redistribution mechanism. Hence, while the competitive Europe strategy appears as dominant, the firm institutionalisation of a redistributive cohesion policy can be seen as a strengthening of the social Europe strategy.

Whether these developments are seen as a political side-payment to the new Member States (to gain their consent to further market integration) or as a social project of solidarity with the least developed regions within the expanding community, they are indicative of the prevalence of the community method as the dominant political project: general regulation rather than administrative customisation. In other words, since it was not perceived as desirable to limit the single market project to the more competitive Member States only, it became necessary to institutionalise a strong counter policy. In sum, administrative uniformity – in the sense of harmonising policies – was still seen as the right way to achieve an efficiently working single market by helping lagging regions to catch-up. In Leonardi's words (2005, p.19), the

> challenge posed by the single market allowed the Commission to fully assume the responsibilities transferred to it by the SEA; national governments on the periphery were given access to the financial resources necessary to counter the economic shock that was expected to be produced by the single market; and regions were empowered to become involved in a policy process that allowed them to fulfil their constitutional responsibilities and have a say in determining their response to challenges posed by the realisation of the single market.

Therefore, the *spatial project* of the EU was the establishment of redistributory mechanisms at the community level (centralisation), which was characterised by common, generally applicable regulations (administrative uniformity). Thus, the setup of cohesion policy as a strong supranational redistributive mechanism reflects a relative strengthening of the equalisation or balancing aspect of the *spatial strategy*. Moreover, political responsibility for the implementation of cohesion policy was now increasingly distributed across the regional, national and European scale. According to Leonardi (2005, p.36) the Europeanisation of cohesion policy has 'significantly changed the nature of relations between institutions and has led to the emergence for the first time of sub-national institutions as significant actors' (scalar multiplicity). Hence, it has been argued that cohesion policy was an important driver of the emergence of a European Union multi-level governance system (Hooghe, 1996; Marks and Hooghe, 2004; see also George, 2004). Thus, these developments resulted in a move towards scalar multiplicity of the *spatial strategy*.

5 Similarly, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty can be seen as the beginning of a new "era" whereby treaty amendments became less inclusive with the opt-outs from the EMU by the United Kingdom and Denmark.

Crucially, this arrangement was not significantly altered, in terms of objectives and the distribution of funds, by the 1995 accessions of Austria, Finland, and Sweden. This may be explained by the relatively high level of socio-economic development in these countries, which did not significantly alter the conventional allocation patterns (North-South), as all three countries are, since their accession, net contributors to the cohesion policy (Molle, 2007, p.148). Consequently, Manzella and Mendez (2009, pp.15-17; see also Leonardi, 2005, pp.21-22) have characterised the 1993 reforms as efforts in 'fine-tuning, decentralisation and effectiveness'. By contrast, the eastern enlargements, as will be shown, seem to have had a more visible impact of both the objectives and the structure of the funds.

In sum (see Appendix I), while both the political and spatial projects remained rooted in the Keynesian welfare state paradigm of centralisation and administrative uniformity (top left corner), the political strategy of the single market constituted a threat to the political commitment to spatially balanced socio-economic development (top right corner). Because of the belief in the efficiency of harmonising regulation, the institutionalisation of the single market depended on the approval of all Member States. As a result, as compensation for their consent to the single market, the group of Mediterranean Member States could successfully claim that supranational market integration (characterised by scalar singularity but socio-spatial differentiation/concentration) ought to be supplemented by a supranational commitment to balanced growth (characterised by scalar multiplicity and a commitment to the equalisation or balancing of socio-spatial activities) (bottom left corner).

3.2.2. Enlargements, Reforms, and Competitiveness (2000-2013)

The Eastern European enlargements of the 2000s can be seen as a watershed moment that upset the earlier balance struck between supranational market integration and supranational redistribution (1988-1999). In preparation for the eastern enlargements, new instruments for particular issues (pre-accession assistance, urban regions, peripheral regions, cross-border cooperation) were launched in the 2000-2006 programming period, many of which were later mainstreamed. Considering that the 1995 accessions did not have a similar effect, the question is why did these reforms occur?

While 12 Member States signed the Treaty of Maastricht to form the European Union in 1992, a further 16 states joined the European Union over the subsequent two decades. On the one hand, the three states that joined in 1995 were relatively similar to the older 12. On the other hand, the 13 countries which joined the European Union after 2004 came to constitute a new eastern periphery, as their socialist legacy rendered them substantially different in terms of the levels of socio-economic development and the prevalent political-administrative practices.

Hence, in addition to the numerical increase in Member States and interests, the lagging socio-economic conditions in the new Member States made all of them net recipients of European Union funds, resulting in a severe negative impact on the allocation patterns among the older Member States (most of which would become net contributors (Molle, 2007, p.148). In other words, due to the increased number and diversity of Member States, the *political project* of regulatory harmonisation became a less appealing solution to supranational market integration. As discussed in Section 2, new practices of governance, built around the idea of policy coordination (decentralising/administrative customisation) began to supplement and replace regulatory integration, based on policy harmonisation. Since the 1999 reforms gave more discretion to the Member States (decentralisation), a debate about the renationalisation of cohesion policy developed (Bachtler and Mendez, 2007; Faludi, 2010; Faludi, 2009; Manzella and Mendez, 2009; Leonardi, 2005; Bruszt, 2008).

However, the present paper argues that, for cohesion policy, new practices of governance began to play a crucial role only with the 2006 and 2013 reforms (see Section 3.2.3. below). The paper holds that the more important and more immediate reason for the renationalisation of cohesion policy is found in the reaction of the older Member States to the threat of lower cohesion policy allocations, as well as to the uncertainty of the enlargement's impact on the European Union's long-term economic outlook. This is consistent with Moravcsik's argument that applicant countries as well as poorer countries are in a weak bargaining position vis-à-vis the wealthier Member States (Moravcsik, 2005, p.16). From this perspective, reforms in the second period appear as successful attempts of the older and wealthier Member States to redefine the rationale of cohesion policy in order to protect their own interests (preventing budgets cuts and promoting the overall competitiveness of the single market). In Moravcsik's words, 'specific interstate concessions and compromises

tend to reflect the priorities of the European Union's core countries, and disproportionally the most powerful among them' (2005, p.17; see also Schimmelfennig, 2015).

Hence, faced with enlargement, the older (net-contributing) Member States pressed for a re-evaluation of the balance between competitive Europe and social Europe that previously defined the *political strategy* of supranational market integration. The Lisbon Agenda introduced competitiveness as an additional central pillar to the redistributive rational of balanced growth. In terms of Brenner's model, the emphasis on competitiveness implied that Member States were freer to differentiate growth poles and to concentrate funding and the promotion pf socio-economic activities in locations with the highest growth potential and/or potential productivity gains.

Indeed, the 2006 cohesion policy reforms can be seen as a move toward administrative customisation and decentralisation (*spatial project*), as the new planning framework involved the coordination of interests through Community Strategic Guidelines and National Strategic Reference Frameworks (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p.19). Parallel to the efforts to make the European Union 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (the Lisbon Agenda), thematic concentration saw the European Social Fund 'increasingly [being] tied to the European employment strategy' (Manzella and Mendez, 2009, p.17). Thus, Manzella and Mendez (2009, p.19) have argued that the programming period 2007-2013 can be characterised as a turn to a more 'strategic approach for targeting EU priorities, centred on the Lisbon strategy'. In consequence, competitiveness considerations increased in importance relative to social and redistribution issues. Therefore, in terms of the *spatial strategy*, a tendency away from equalisation or balancing and toward the delivery of the thematic objectives of the Lisbon Agenda can be detected.

In sum (see Appendix 2), the increased number and diversity of Member States and their expected impact on the allocation patterns, led to a tentative change in the *political project* and the *spatial project* from regulatory toward coordinative integration. This implies a subtle movement from centralisation towards decentralisation, as well as a movement from administrative uniformity towards administrative customisation. The Lisbon Agenda (*political strategy*) reshuffled the relative balance between competitive Europe and social Europe in favour of the former. This also implied that policies ought to target the specific potentials at the national, regional, and local scale. Moreover, cohesion policy began to be linked to the competitiveness objectives of the Lisbon Agenda, shifting its focus away from its equalising or balancing rationale (*spatial strategy*).

3.2.3. Increased Consistency and Efficiency? (2014-2020)

Willem Molle concluded his 2007 analysis of cohesion policy on the note that the present European Union policy coordination mechanisms (*political project*) 'are in need of review and that more adequate mechanisms are to be found to produce lasting and balanced results' (2007, p.287). His argument concerned both the horizontal and the vertical dimension of policy coordination.

To begin with, Molle makes the point that the horizontal coordination of European Union policies is far from ideal for the consistent delivery of socio-spatial cohesion. He argues that the existence of large funds for cohesion policy relative to the size of the funds available for other European Union objectives (notably competitiveness and sustainability) has led to a blurring of objectives, in the sense that cohesion policy funds are increasingly made available to these other objectives (Molle, 2007, pp.285-287). Additionally, Molle argues that while policy coordination increasingly depends on more open forms of coordination, the financial instruments of cohesion policy attach strong conditionalities to the distribution of funds. Hence, he stresses a contradiction in the vertical coordination of cohesion policy, where overarching objectives are subject to change but the implementation mechanisms do not display a similar degree of flexibility.

The last two sections have illustrated the first point (horizontal coordination) by outlining how the relative balance of the competitive Europe and the social Europe strategies shifted in the aftermath of the eastern enlargements, leading to a blurring of cohesion policy objectives and the objectives of the Lisbon Agenda. It was also pointed out that concerns about the expected impact of the eastern enlargements on the allocation

patterns of cohesion policy can explain this alignment. In a European Union characterised by a relatively wealthy West and a relatively poor East (Moravcsik, 2005, p.18), the project of increasing overall competitiveness of the single market in the global economy became more relevant than the more traditional approach of balanced growth. The negative consequences of this zero-sum bargaining approach on policy consistency are likely to have been a trigger for the search for "more adequate mechanisms" of coordination. Accordingly, the paper argues that the period since the 2006 cohesion policy reforms has seen the tentative emergence of more experimentalist/meta-governance practices (vertical coordination).

In terms of horizontal coordination, the blurring of objectives continued in the post-2013 period as cohesion policy has become 'the principal investment tool for delivering the Europe 2020 goals' (European Commission, 2010). The EU 2020 strategy (*political strategy*) 'is about delivering growth'. Hence, in deviation from its initial rationale as a counterweight to the single market, cohesion policy is now firmly established as the primary tool for delivering growth and competitiveness (*spatial strategy*). Thus, while the majority of the funds will still be allocated to the less developed peripheral regions (especially the new Member States and Portugal), the focus on "key growth priorities" tilts the *spatial selectivity* of European Union cohesion policy toward spaces with greater potential to contribute to smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth. This may partially explain why European Union cohesion policy was ineffective in preventing socio-spatial polarisation in the new Member States (Darvas, 2014). Indeed, there is a possibility that focusing cohesion policy on the thematic/key growth priorities of EU 2020 prioritises urban over rural regions, which is in accordance with Brenner's (2004) finding that the urban is becoming the primary spatial unit for capital accumulation and, thus, the driving force in the re-scaling of regulatory landscapes (Brenner, Peck, and Theodore, 2010). The creation of a specific instrument for urban regions (urban innovation actions) and the growing importance of place-based interventions (Barca, 2009) can be seen as evidence for a changing spatial selectivity of European Union cohesion policy (see Appendix 3), where efficiency and equity objectives become increasingly framed as mutually constitutive (Demidov, 2015, pp.45-46).

In terms of vertical coordination, cohesion policy has become more place-based (Barca 2009), more focused on the delivery of a limited set of broad thematic objectives, based on the concentration of funding on fewer priorities and introduced ex-ante conditionalities (European Commission, 2014) (differentiating/concentrating). This arrangement distributes responsibilities across the supranational, national, regional and local scales. Policy coordination between EU 2020 strategy and cohesion policy is achieved through the "European Semester" based on Annual Growth Surveys and Country-specific Recommendations. However, the system appears to be working rather sluggishly. This is exemplified by the fact that dissent persists over how to address the urgent task of bringing the implementation of the reformed post-2013 cohesion policy up to speed. Rather than attempting to reach consensus on immediate solutions, the debates tend to displace the issue into the post-2020 programming period, putting their hopes into further major structural reforms.

In sum (Appendix III), the *political project* of the EU increasingly resembles experimentalist or meta-governance. Responsibilities and competences are increasingly decentralised and custom-tailored to local conditions. What distinguishes this mode of governance from simple multi-level governance is the centrality of integrating the different levels and centres of decision-making in concrete ways that enable the co-creation of the policy. Similarly, the *spatial project* combines features of administrative customisation (i.e. place-based) and administrative uniformity (i.e. ex-ante conditionality). The *spatial strategy* converges upon divergence (Medve-Bálint, 2014) as the promotion of place-based growth becomes the general rational of cohesion policy. Finally, in terms of the *political strategy*, the EU 2020 strategy is structurally akin to the Lisbon Agenda. In conclusion, it can be said that the emergence of a more experimentalist/meta-governance architecture had neither a major positive impact horizontally on policy consistency, nor vertically on policy efficiency.

4. Conclusion: Inconsistent Meta-Governance or Adaptive Experimentalist Governance?

In conclusion, the paper has attempted to indicate how the process of European integration, under the primacy of interest representation at the European Union level, is leading to a transformation of the political process and the emergence of new modes of governance (*political project*).

The paper has argued that both experimentalist governance and meta-governance are premised on the idea that in a world of complex interdependence and systemic uncertainty, where policy objectives cannot be established from the outset but ought to be discovered in the process of achieving them (de Burca, Keohane, and Sabel, 2013), the open-ended coordination of interests is more efficient and sustainable than any attempt to harmonise interests. In other words, these modes of governance stress that one size does not fit all, as common challenges require context-specific local solutions, utilising local knowledge and skills.

However, there also is a crucial difference between the two approaches. On the one hand, meta-governance is described as an unstable equilibrium of different coordination methods which will inevitably lead to inconsistencies and policy failure. As a remedy, irony and continued experimentation are key to dealing with this prospect. On the other hand, experimentalist governance stresses the links between these different coordination methods and is rather optimistic about rooting out inconsistencies between them by applying the right managerial practices. In other words, while meta-governance admits that all coordination must ultimately fail, experimentalist governance proposes that the right managerial practices can lead to a virtuous cycle of reflexive learning and continuous improvement. Nevertheless, critics have contended that in as far as experimentalist governance frames incommensurable interests as mutually reinforcing, it supports the emergence of a post-political consensus.

Building on this discussion, the paper argued that making cohesion policy deliver the Lisbon Agenda and EU 2020 objectives can be interpreted as an alignment of two *political strategies*. This led to the question of whether the resulting policy mix was characterised by unintentional consequences (hypothesis I) or achieved the desired outcomes (hypothesis II). If the first was the case, this would be taken as evidence that the European Union mode of governance is not (yet) experimentalist, but rather a form of meta-governance.

The paper proceeded to discuss European integration in terms of political and spatial co-evolution through three periods. While the first period (1988-1999) was characterised by relative stability, the second period (2000-2013) was characterised by periodic reform in reaction to the eastern enlargement, as well as the beginning of a shift from the social Europe strategy to the competitive Europe strategy. This development intensified during the third period (2014+), which also saw the emergence of more experimentalist governance practices. Building on Brenner (2004), the discussion has attempted to provide a more nuanced picture of spatial selectivity. For example, it has pointed out that *spatial strategy* and *political strategy*, even though complementary, may diverge significantly, as can be seen in the intention to balance the *political strategy* of the single market with the *spatial strategy* of socio-spatial cohesion. Furthermore, it has been argued that the evolution of the *political project* (mode of governance) is motivated by attempts to reduce the trade-off between responsiveness and participation in an increasingly diverse European Union.

As for the two hypotheses, the evidence suggests that, since the alignment of cohesion policy with the Lisbon Agenda and the EU 2020 strategy,

- Spatial disparities across the European Union broadened, at a time when rationale and spatial selectivity of cohesion policy shifted from balancing or equalising to concentrating or differentiating socio-spatial activities.
- At the same time, it is not evident that making cohesion policy deliver the Lisbon Agenda and EU 2020 objectives had the intended outcome of making the single market more competitive.
- While 2013 reforms put in place or amplified many elements of an experimentalist governance architecture (i.e. place-based approach, broad framework goals, ex-ante conditionalities, more emphasis on monitoring and feedback), implementation in the 2014-2020 programming period is lagging and discussions about the future of cohesion policy focus on major reform, rather than incremental change and reflexive learning.

These findings point to the conclusion that the mode of European Union governance currently resembles a meta-governance configuration, in which open-ended experimentation is an important feature. However, rather than necessarily leading to continuous reflexive learning, the European Union mode of governance is better understood as an "unstable equilibrium" of ultimately inconsistent modes of coordination. The discussion has shown that the emergence of more experimentalist practices of governance should be seen as a reaction to increasingly divergent interests in the aftermath of the eastern enlargements, and not as the

cause for their divergence. Thus, while the current European Union mode of governance does not achieve the experimentalist ideal of making incommensurable interests converge towards a common denominator, the reason might be that the experimentalist architecture has not yet been *institutionalised* to a sufficient degree.

In this context it is interesting to see that while the reforms of the second period can be understood, by and large, from the perspective of intergovernmental bargaining perspective (Moravcsik, 1998), the subsequent "strategic turn" (Manzella and Mendez, 2009) after 2006 and, especially, after 2013, indicate a tendency towards multi-level policy coordination. While unanimous decision-making ensures that the Member States preserve their central position in approving major reforms, the substance of these reforms lies in information pooling and reflexive learning. As such, the supranational as well as the regional and local levels occupy an increasingly central role in, first, the provision of information, and secondly, in acting upon this information in locally appropriate ways. However, while a mature experimentalist governance architecture would successfully link these two functions to "a new kind of centre" (de Burca, Keohane, and Sabel, 2014), enabling reflexive learning and framework adaptation, multi-level meta-governance ultimately fails to do so.

Finally, what might be crucial factors for a transition to proper experimentalist governance? On the one hand, the argument of Laclau and Mouffe, that experimentalist managerial practices cannot reduce individuals' experiences to a common denominator, should be taken seriously. Their contention would be – against Habermas (1984, 1987) – that it is utopian to assume that, first, experimentalist governance arrangements could approximate an ideal speech situation, while secondly inducing or incentivising actors to follow a communicative rather than instrumental rationality. On the other hand, the institutionalist literature on socialisation (Lewis, 2005; Wiener, 2008) argues that working inside European Union institutions inspires national representatives with a "logic of appropriateness" that is often described as a "culture of compromise". Furthermore, deliberative intergovernmentalists (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter, 2015; Puetter, 2012) argue that compromise-oriented deliberations rather than hard bargaining are characteristic of European Union decision-making today. In any case, the question remains as to what extent these qualities apply to the lower tiers of decision-making.

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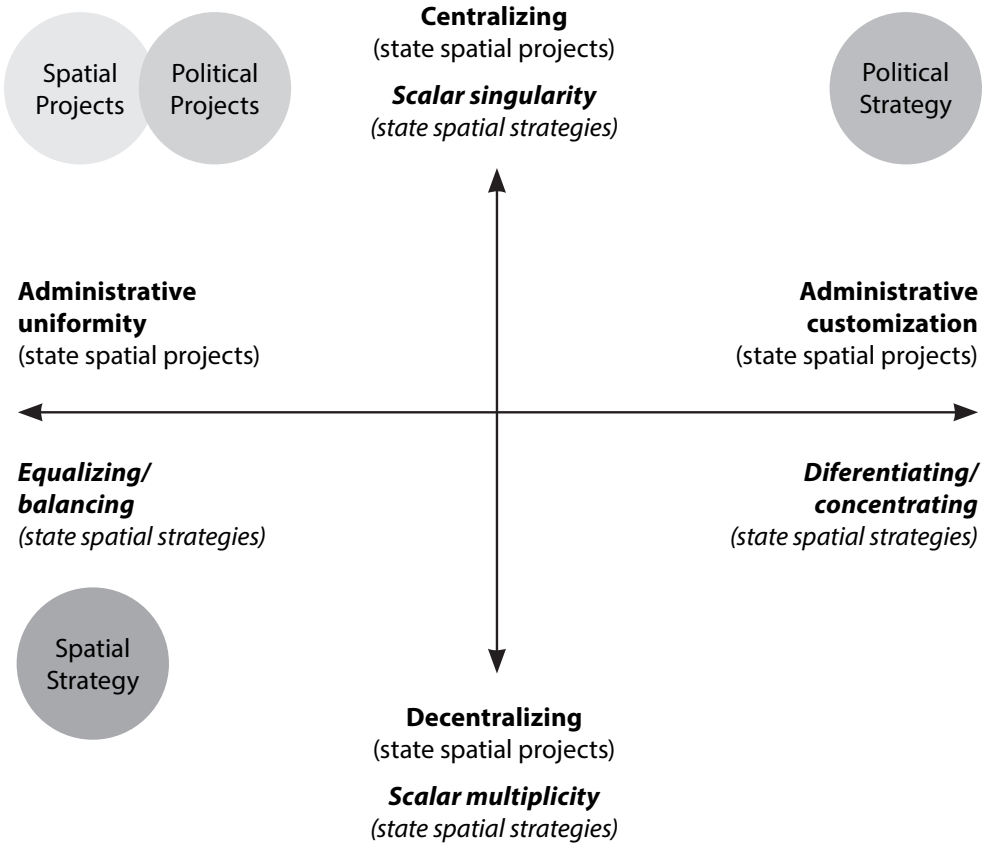
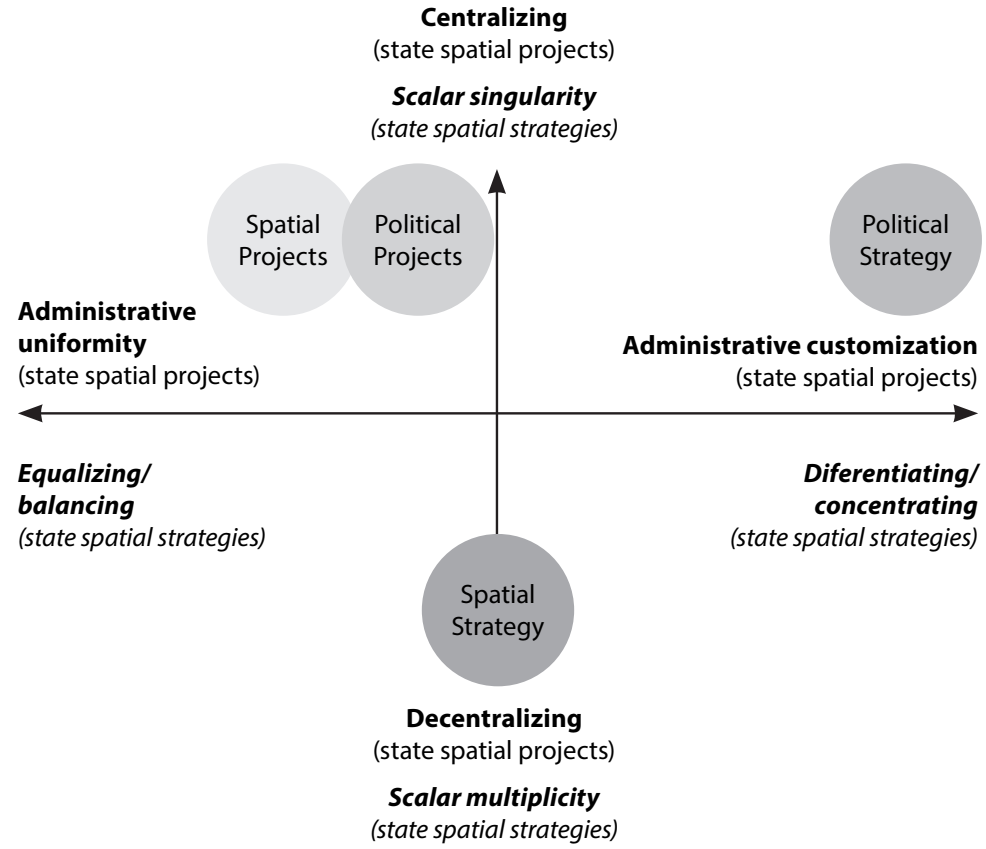
Annexes

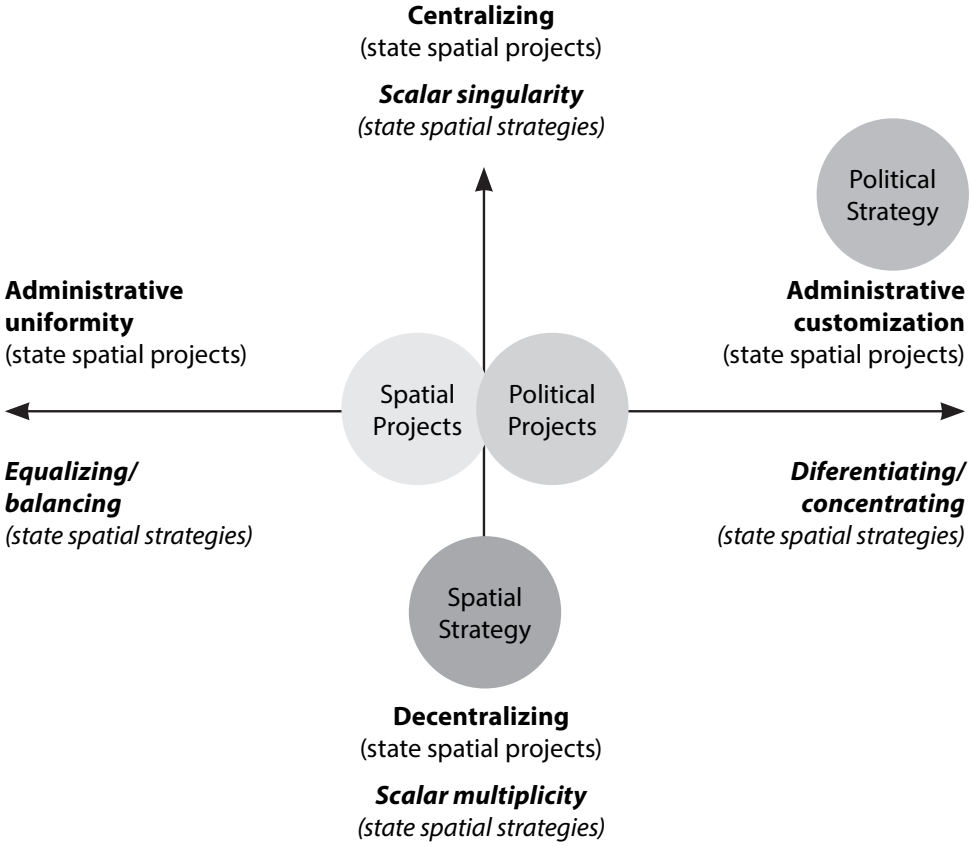
I) Launch and relative stability (1988-1999)



II) Enlargements, reforms, and competitiveness (2000-2013)



III) Increased consistency and efficiency? (2014-2020)



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