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# EDITORIAL

This issue (4.2) of Transactions of AESOP brings together a series of papers which reflect on the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) document which was adopted by the then member states of the European Union (EU) in Potsdam, Germany in 1999, and is published shortly after the adoption in December 2020 of a new EU Territorial Agenda 2030 document under the recent German EU Presidency. It features an introduction and five original papers which explore the legacies of the ESDP and the present and future prospects for European territorial development and urban policy. After a year of great uncertainty marked by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and all the immediate worries and concerns it has engendered, the papers offer an opportunity to step back and take a 'long view' of some of these matters – to 'look back to look forward' as the introductory piece terms it.

The past year has seen the project of Transactions reach a new stage in its development. The management structure has evolved, with the appointment of an Editor in Chief who continues to work with the Working Group that has piloted the launch of the Journal and its development over four volumes. The Working Group met in Autumn 2020 to discuss the further evolution of journal governance and management arrangements including a transition towards the constitution of a core Editorial Group with an expanded membership and clearly identified remits for its members. More details and a call for expressions of interest in joining the Editorial Group will be forthcoming in the course of 2021 events permitting. On a more technical level, the AESOP AEKOM Working Group has provided invaluable support to us over the past year on the planned move to an Open Journal System for Transactions. Getting the right package in place will be a huge bonus for contributors and reviewers and in facilitating the management of the journal.

It is very positive that the Journal continues to attract excellent contributions in a competitive field of academic publishing, especially given the period of disruption and adaptation to new working practices which have affected academic life and life in general over the past year.

As the last issue of this volume it is appropriate to end with a note of thanks to all those who have chosen to publish their work in Transactions over the past year and who continue to support and foster the Journal's development, including: the members of the Transactions Working Group - Ela Babalik, Andrea Frank, and Nikos Karadimitriou; the Secretary General and President of AESOP; the AESOP Treasurer; the members of the AEKOM Working Group; members of the Transactions Editorial Board; all those who have acted as reviewers; and last, but by no means least, Dr. Bertie Dockerill whose proofreading helps maintain the high editorial standards of the Journal.

**Olivier Sykes**

Editor in Chief of Transactions of AESOP

# **LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD - REFLECTING ON THE LEGACY AND FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE**

Oliver Sykes<sup>a</sup>

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) was a policy document produced and agreed jointly by EU governments during the 1990s with the support of the European Commission (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). It was intended as an indicative framework to guide spatially significant public policy making in the EU at all spatial scales from the Community level, to the regional and local levels. A non-binding policy statement, the ESDP sought to guide institutions in the exercise of existing competences which influence spatial development and its application was to be through voluntary co-operation based on the principle of subsidiarity. Integrated application of the ESDP policy options was to be achieved by a reorientation of national spatial development policies and community sectoral policies, at three levels of spatial co-operation - the (European) Community Level; the transnational/national level; and, the regional/local level. In order to achieve this, the ESDP called for 'horizontal' co-operation between the authorities responsible for sectoral and spatial policies at each administrative level as well as 'vertical' co-operation between the different levels - for example, between the national and local level. The extent of its explicit and implicit application was the subject of academic and policymaker reflection in the years following its adoption (see ESPON, 2006) with its degree of influence being seen as variable across contexts and scales.

This special issue brings together a series of papers written in the period between the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the ESDP in Potsdam, Germany in 1999, and the adoption of the new EU Territorial Agenda 2030 (MRSPDTC, 2020) in December 2020. This seemed an apposite moment to reflect on the legacies of the ESDP and the present and future prospects for European territorial development and urban policy.

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As the novelist L.P. Hartley once wrote 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there' (Hartley, 1953). Understanding where 'we are coming from' is often seen as crucial in thinking about 'where we are going to' in human affairs including in the field of planning. Reflecting this notion of 'looking back to look forward' the present collection of papers takes a 'long view' of the ESDP's influence. A number of the papers go back to the adoption of the ESDP in 1999 and recount the evolving story of European spatial planning and territorial development policy since then, before considering contemporary developments such as the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the prospects for territorial development in Europe in the 2020s and beyond.

One theme which emerges from the papers is the enduring relevance of the ESDP's analyses and policy orientations. Indeed, a number of the authors observe that many of these are arguably even more pertinent and urgent to address today than they were at the end of the 1990s. Some contributors also note that, had certain of the ESDP's policy orientations been more completely and vigorously pursued in the intervening decades, then this might have attenuated some of the contemporary challenges facing Europe. Whilst the language in which the priorities of policies pertaining to territorial development are couched may have subtly evolved, the issues it invokes often remain remarkably constant.

Some of the ideas articulated in the ESDP have demonstrated a notable staying power. This is the case of polycentric development which - though it drew on a heritage of spatial thinking that predated the ESDP - received a notable fillip from its inclusion as a core tenet of the document. Its characteristic of 'multi-interpretability' (Purkharthofer this issue) ensured it was the most widely discussed and at times and in some contexts 'applied' of the ideas in the document. It has continued to feature in the ESDP's putative 'successor' documents - the series of Territorial Agendas. It is, for example, implicit in the Territorial Agenda 2030's strapline of a 'future for all places' and explicit in its invitation to 'policy makers from all levels to promote polycentric development models that offer a role for all places' (MRSPTDTC, 2020, p.15). The idea has also resonated around the globe in contemporary debates about how development might be planned and managed in the 'urban century'. For example, polycentricity is promoted in the UN's Urban Agenda of 2016 which supports 'the implementation of integrated, polycentric and balanced territorial development policies and plans' (UN Habitat, 2017, p.24) and lists 'polycentrism' alongside staple spatial development principles such as 'compactness and density' and 'mixed uses' (UN Habitat, 2017, p.15).

Despite these legacies and ongoing relevance, some papers in this special issue also argue that the European spatial planning/territorial development agenda since 1999 has not lived-up to 'the aspirations of 1999' (Böhme in this issue). More widely, whilst Europe and the EU have traversed moments of confidence and optimism such as the enlargements of the mid-2000s, there have also been some challenges and reversals - notably in the second decade since the ESDP's adoption. In some ways the fluctuating fortunes of the post-ESDP spatial development and territorial agendas have mirrored these wider trends. But there are also more specific dynamics at play relating to changing perceptions and paradigms of regional development and place-based policy, and views of the role that EU Cohesion Policy is expected to play as a component of the wider 'European project'.

In thinking more widely of the general historical conjuncture, or 'moment' when the ESDP was developed - notably from the vantage point of 2021 - it is perhaps a little too easy to 'romanticise' the Europe of the 1990s with its return to growth following the lean years of the 1980s in many places and the sense of promise following the end of the Cold War and fall of the Iron Curtain (the situation for those caught-up in the Balkan Wars at the time, for example, was altogether more difficult and traumatic). Yet as regards ideas about planning and regional development models, it is probably fair to say that the ESDP - rather like many regional and urban strategies and plans of the economically buoyant post-World War 2 period - was reflecting on how to promote more balanced and sustainable development at a moment in time when there was a greater anticipation that adequate resources and institutional capacity to do so would be available. However, in the period since then, especially after 2008, and again perhaps mirroring earlier cycles in planning history - for example, the challenging years of the 1970s and 1980s which in many contexts saw shifts from comprehensive regional and urban policies and plans towards more selectively targeted regeneration and attempts to attract inward investment - EU structural investments and place-based policy have increasingly been expected to contribute to growth and recovery objectives. This shift in context and priorities towards 'doing more with less' and working with territorial and sectoral specificities was arguably less propitious for the development of more comprehensive 'bigger picture' visions and strategies (Santamaria and Elissalde this issue).

The star of European spatial planning/development - as conceived of in the ESDP and debates at the time about its potential and that of European spatial planning - has thus waned since 1999. A number of contributors note how the Territorial Agendas of 2007 and 2011 did not gain the same traction as the ESDP amongst planning communities across Europe. Planners were less involved in their formulation and the resulting documents were less like typical planning documents in terms of structure and content. The ESDP was also adopted at a different time with perhaps a less congested policy landscape to 'shine out' from, whilst Purkarthofer (this issue) also notes how more practical issues may have led to a lower take-up of the Territorial Agendas by planners, such as their limited availability in different language versions and in hard copy.

With just over two decades having elapsed since the adoption of the ESDP, the papers in this special issue thus reflect on the legacies of the ESDP and the present and future prospects for European territorial development and urban policy.

The paper by Andreas Faludi explores the notion of European spatial planning 'beyond sovereignty'. He points out the essential fact that sovereignty and power are not one and the same thing in the contemporary international arena. The paper takes a realistic look at the EU's institutional set-up, eschewing the reductionist terms of public debate which 'perceives a seminal struggle between a non-elected Brussels bent on supranationalism and individuals' own democratic governments defending their turfs'. Regarding the question of whether the EU is a supranational or intergovernmental entity, Faludi concludes that 'supranational - like a federal state - it is not' - yet given its extensive powers and institutional apparatus the term 'intergovernmental' no longer quite fits either. It is perhaps therefore *suis generis*: a category to itself. This wider context defined not only the parameters for the 'making of the ESDP' (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002), but has also conditioned the subsequent story of European spatial planning. Faludi concludes by arguing that that perhaps viewing European space, not as a vast administrative-legal territory, but rather as an archipelago where the sea gives superb access to the islands (i.e. various European states and territories) and to the wider world, could be a way to conceptualise and advance future developments in European spatial planning.

In their paper, Frédéric Santamaria and Bernard Elissalde argue that since 1999, the ambitions of the ESDP to promote reflection on, and the development of, the whole EU space seem to have been dissolved in the notion of territory, notably as regards EU Cohesion Policy. They emphasise how the context of European integration today is profoundly different from that which prevailed at the end of the 1990s. The trend, they argue, is at best towards particularities and at worst towards dislocation forces, leading to the risk of triggering a process of 'de-europeanisation'. Against this backdrop they note how the idea of territory has been the subject of many debates. These range from attempts at definition to its rejection as representing a renunciation of the 'big picture' perspective on spatial development that the ESDP once advocated. Using a constructivist definition of territory, they argue that it is not possible to separate territory as a 'container' from the various realities of space in so far as these two dimensions are closely intertwined. They conclude that considering these two dimensions when analysing EU space can support reflection on spatial planning at this scale.

The paper by Kai Böhme also notes how the world has changed substantially since the adoption of the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (MSPTD, 2011). This is typified by the financial crisis of the late 2000s, COVID-19, migration, climate change, and digitalisation. Meanwhile the rise of concern for so-called 'places left behind' suggests that ideas supporting balanced development and cohesion need to be re-emphasised in policy to ensure that the achievements of European integration are not put at risk. Yet despite so much change, Böhme notes how most of the ESDP themes are 'so timeless that they are still valid 20 years later' and echoed in the Territorial Agenda 2030. Notably 'The underlying aim of the ESDP, to push the EU towards a more balanced and sustainable development of its territory, is still valid today, not least given the territorial impacts of COVID-19'. He thus notes that 'it is time to bring new life to the original objectives of the ESDP and support them with clear governance and implementation tools'.

The paper from Eva Purkarthofer looks back over the experience of the ESDP and what 'enticed' policymakers at different levels to engage with it. She notes how the effects and impacts of European policies strongly depend on their interpretation and application by domestic actors. This is especially true for fields such as European spatial planning and development, which are characterised by informal agreements and fragmented competences. Given this status domestic actors in the field of urban and regional planning are not always



obliged to interact with EU policies. Consequently, EU policies only gain importance if such domestic actors consider them relevant and meaningful and establish links to their respective areas of influence. In this respect, the ESDP is often regarded as a success story in European spatial planning having been relatively well known among planners across Europe. However, the Territorial Agenda documents – often considered successors to the ESDP, have not been met with the same enthusiasm and interest. The relative success of the ESDP in appealing to planners is explored using the concept of storytelling and the role of planning education in fostering interest in European spatial development amongst ‘future planners’ is stressed.

The final paper from Carlotta Fioretti and Martina Pertoldi considers the functional area approach promoted by EU regional policy discourse, and how it shapes and legitimates new spatial configurations, with implications for urban analysis and policy approaches. It notes how the two separate discourses in EU policy frameworks which emerged from the 1990s onwards around firstly, urban policy, and secondly, spatial or territorial policy discourse (as developed, for example, through the ESDP) started to converge in the 2000s. This influenced the understanding of the urban dimensions of EU policy, and growing attention was paid to the spatial and territorial development of EU cities and city-regions. The paper presents findings of an analysis of nearly 1000 strategies for Sustainable Urban Development funded by the EU in 2014-2020. This reveals that the functional area approach applies not only to metropolitan areas, big cities and Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), but different types of territories, beyond metropolitan areas. The paper concludes there is a need for further research on what spatialities and territorial arrangements emerge from the functional area approach as it will be a focus for integrated territorial and development strategies under EU Cohesion Policy (2021-2027) and is supported by both the new Leipzig Charter (EUMUM, 2020) and Territorial Agenda 2030 (MRSPTDTC, 2020).

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# EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING BEYOND SOVEREIGNTY

Andreas Faludi<sup>a</sup>

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By definition sovereign, States find themselves inescapably in a situation of permanent competition. Moreover, given that an inherent quality of sovereignty is to exclude obeying whomever else, nobody, neither individuals nor institutions can arbitrate between them. This being the case, in the international arena power becomes the one and only currency. It seems basic even to each State's survival: in this endless competition, the sustainability of each depends on the capacity to maintain a sufficient level of power.

(Badie, 2018, p.44 translated by the author)<sup>1</sup>

What is ... needed is reflecting on new ways of adapting politics and democracy to the unique and universal world of networks...

(Balligand and Maquart, 1990, p.219 translated by the author)<sup>2</sup>

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1 Par définition souverains, les États se trouvent inévitablement en situation de compétition incessante. Et celle-ci ne peut être arbitrée par personne ni par aucune institution, étant donné que la caractéristique intrinsèque de la Souveraineté dispense d'obéir à qui que ce soit. Dans cet esprit, la puissance devient la seule unité de compte du jeu international. Elle apparaît même comme la base de survie de chaque État : dans cette compétition infinie, la pérennité de chacun passe par la capacité de maintenir un niveau suffisant de puissance. (Badie, 2018, page 44; translation Andreas Faludi)

2 Il faut ... réfléchir à une forme nouvelle d'adaptation de la sphère politique et de la démocratie au monde unique et universel des réseaux... (Balligand and Maquart, 1990, page 219; translation Andreas Faludi)

## 1. Introduction

The above quotes relate to the ambivalence of its members towards the European Union construct. Wishing to remain sovereign, they simultaneously acknowledge that they have to adapt to a new world. So, they conclude treaties which give the Union specific powers. Unable to unilaterally give itself powers, or 'competences' in EU jargon, their Union is therefore 'intergovernmental'. If it were able to assume powers on its own, it would be like a federal state. As such, the Union could exercise some degree of 'territoriality', or control over its borders. As it is, it cannot.

Below I discuss sovereignty and territoriality; concepts that are being invoked in the context of European integration, and in particular in European spatial planning. Against this backdrop, the making of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is then briefly discussed. Thereafter, I expand on the expectations of it, including my own. This leads to a discussion of how we might look at the EU as neither a federal or super state, nor as an intergovernmental construct, but rather as a 'neo-mediaeval' configuration and what the implications of this are for European space and planning. Let me give away this much: they are counter-intuitive in that I suggest that we could – and perhaps should – think of EU member states as islands forming part of an archipelago in a sea of mutual relations. But first a few preliminary remarks concerning the present EU are in order.

It is not always appreciated what competences as defined in the EU treaties are. Importantly, they do not create obligations for the EU to act. Whether they lead to any action is subject to (1) the European Commission under its exclusive right of initiative making a relevant proposal and (2) the same proposal being approved by the Council of the European Union – popularly called the 'Council of Ministers' – which represents EU member states. In addition – but this is not the point here – the European Parliament under what is called co-decision making needs to accept it. Exceptions are the – few – exclusive competences of the EU administered by the Commission on its own which mainly concern customs and competition policies. So, on the whole, being the masters of the EU treaties, member states not only decide which competences they give away, but also check the way in which the Commission invokes them.

Accordingly, supranational the Union is not, but its right of initiative gives the Commission discretion as to which of the Union's competences it triggers, when, and in what form. The more federalist spirit and a favourably inclined general public of days gone by meant more acceptance of this, and a more formidable role for the Commission in the past than is now the case when the attractiveness of a federal perspective has all but diminished. This is a matter of 'high politics'. Against this backdrop, this paper deals instead with the 'low politics' of European spatial planning.

Pursuing relevant initiatives taken in 1989 – co-incidentally the bicentenary of the French Revolution defining the meaning of the French nation and the occasion for publishing the book from which at least one quote above has been drawn (Balligand and Maquart, 1990) – conceivably against their better judgement as planners, and being national officials, the makers of the ESDP (European Communities, 1999) defended the positions of the member states they represented. If the Union had been a federation, this might have been different. But the cold truth – see above – is that it is not.

When planners first met to consider the matter, Jacques Delors was President of the European Commission, and the Single Market was taking shape. Above all else the latter was about removing barriers to trade, so as to enhance competition. To enable them to hold their own on a future 'level playing field', and as a *quid pro quo* for the advantages accruing to core member states, the then European Community undertook to support 'least favoured regions'. The measures envisioned, including the development of infrastructure, were sure to have an impact upon spatial development. The challenge of planning the EU territory overall seemed obvious.

But not all planners in Europe were attuned to planning on a national, let alone a transnational scale. Planners were following European developments only where there was some form or other of national planning. Even then, colleagues from other national ministries – spending departments, or sectors in planning jargon – were more directly involved, and they were not always planners' friends. As the only one of the original twelve

member states involved, *aménagement du territoire* as practiced in France could aspire to do what planning should aim for: coordinating policies, in this case national, as they related to space. The above immediately shows that what this paper describes as spatial planning is in fact an umbrella term which covers various forms of planning under different flags and carrying different weights in individual national, as well as European, contexts.

In the mid-1980s when European regional policy – the label at the time for what now goes under the title of Cohesion Policy – appeared on the horizon in its reinvigorated form (it had existed in a much more rudimentary form since 1975), national ministries of various stripes were watchful; especially as it meant giving up national treasure which these ministries could otherwise have used at their pleasure. In contrast, the common funds were earmarked for specific uses and subject to conditions which, in the event of their obtaining them, national ministries had to observe (such as the requirement of involving regional authorities and other stakeholders). Giving up wealth, as much as the right to develop their territories as they pleased would be odd, were it not that the policy served a common purpose. This common purpose was rebalancing, as deemed necessary for its functioning, the Community's territory as a whole.

It followed, that net-contributors received less, whereas net-recipients received more than they had contributed to the common funds. Neither kept full control whether over the budget, or over spatial development because all had to observe agreed criteria and follow the same rules. All this made EU regional policy a contested field; net-contributors seeking to reduce their contributions and tightening conditions put on the funding that they had to concede, and net recipients seeking to increase funding and have the same conditions relaxed. Needless to say, this created – and creates – friction, with a Commission operating the whole system with inventiveness and drive. Under the surface, the fundamental issues lurk of: what European integration means, and who should take the lead – the Commission representing the Union, or the member states. With this as a backdrop the paper now discusses the twin notions of sovereignty and territoriality.

## 2. Sovereignty and Territoriality

A Commission being in charge of 'spatial planning' would be at the expense of member states controlling their territories. Controlling its own territory is a defining characteristic of any state being sovereign:

The foundational principle ... is the submission of all that space contains – beasts, goods, lands and waters – to one single authority exclusive of all others, and this even where it sometimes delegates part of its powers. The territory is defined as the space concerned, with the whole territorial mosaic which it contains, the elements of territorial networks with it contains included. And, since sovereignty is exclusive and indivisible, this territory is strictly delimited in space, enclosed by a frontier which separates it from the exterior not subject to its rule. (Balligand and Maquart, 1990, p.31 translation by the author)<sup>3</sup>

Sovereignty is what kings used to exercise before the people took over. It follows that the territory concerned is a legal/political construct unlike space in all its complexity as discussed in the geography literature. Now, as soon as the people had wrestled power from the kings, the meaning of territory changed: it no longer stood for the property of the sovereign but became the property of the people. Hitherto, beyond being the often motley collection of subjects of their sovereign, their identity had been unimportant. However, as soon as the people came to be thought of as 'a nation' with an identity of its own:

The spiritual identity of the nation rather than the divine body of the king now posed the territory and population as an ideal abstraction. Or rather, the physical territory and population were conceived as the extension of the transcendent essence of the nation. The modern concept

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3 Le principe fondateur ... est la soumission de tout ce que contient l'espace –bêtes, biens, terres et eaux –, à une seule autorité exclusive de toute autre, même si celle-ci parfois délègue une partie de son pouvoir. Le territoire se définit par l'espace soumis incluant les territoires-mosaïques et les éléments de territoires-réseaux qu'il contient. Et comme la souveraineté est exclusive et sans partage, ce territoire est strictement tranché dans l'espace, enclos par une frontière nette qui le sépare de l'extérieur, non-soumis à ses règles.

of nation thus inherited the patrimonial body of the monarchic state and reinvented it in a new form. ... This uneasy structural relationship was stabilized by the national identity: a cultural, integrating identity, founded on a biological continuity of blood relations, a spatial continuity of territory, and linguistic commonality. (Hardt and Negri 2000, p.5)

Before that, the very meaning of 'nation' had been different. It was applied to students with a common origin in the select few university towns, not the subjects of a prince that were called such. The areas of sovereign rule were the, more or less coincidental outcomes of dynastic wars, intermarriages, and succession. The subjects of the prince were not really homogenous. It was their stepping into the shoes of their princes that resulted in the question of their former subjects' identity being posed. The answer to this question eluded French revolutionaries: The people were nowhere to be found - *introuvable*, as per the title of a book by Rosanvallon (1998). Rather than strengthening existing identity, one needed to be manufactured. Early-nineteenth century ideologues did this with gusto, leading to a veritable industry of manufacturing nations and their idols (Thiesse, 1999). Before, as emphasised already, the question of the people's identity had not even arisen. Now that the people were taking on the mantle of the sovereign, it was in urgent need of an answer.

One long-term consequence of this, was the absolutisation and sacralisation of borders (Balibar, 2009, p.193). This is one of the reasons why European space is divided into purportedly self-contained territories with the European Union, as such, not deemed to have a territory at all (Gatawis, 2000). This in turn stands in the way of any real, open-ended cooperation in planning. As a consequence, the ESDP, about which more below, could never be more than a bland statement of principles. Without putting sovereignty on the line, member states would concede no more.

Could this be otherwise? David J. Elkins takes us *Beyond Sovereignty* (1995). He foresees 'government à la carte', something I shall take up below. Importantly, he suggests that this 'is already happening, but virtually no one has noticed because the discussion relies on a vocabulary appropriate to the era now ending rather than the one born or created or constructed' (Elkins, 1995, pp.3-4). What makes his work relevant here is that he identifies the exclusivity of a continuous and contiguous territory as a key assumption underlying present thinking. Without this, territories would not need to be congruent, having 'the same boundaries even though they deal with different matters' (1995, p.14).

So much about sovereignty. Now what of its twin territoriality which, paraphrasing the classic definition by Robert Sack (1986) stands for controlling whatever enters and leaves a territory? It is because territoriality is a fundamental principle of legal and constitutional thinking, that we are disturbed when our states have to give something away or, heaven forbid, something penetrates their borders: their integrity, and with it our integrity as 'the people' is on the block. Of course, the state can accept interventions in much the same way as we do, when needed, with our own bodies. But such acceptance needs to be voluntary; which is the assumption which underpins the intergovernmental Union. Only when an activist Commission stretches its meaning, as if it were heading towards becoming a federation, do we balk against such ideas. True, a federal Europe may not be the answer, but the evolving dynamic situations which we face may require it/us to do more than invoking such classic alternatives. This paper shows how the issues described above played themselves out in such meagre attempts to arrive at a form of European spatial planning as have been made.

### 3. The ESDP Process

I have spent much effort on theorising planning. Based on this my empirical research was, initially, on Dutch planning. To plan a densely populated Netherlands is no walkover, but with colleagues we found that the Dutch at least had a planning doctrine. With this doctrine as a guide, and the dynamism of Dutch development notwithstanding, Dutch planners succeeded, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in keeping their country more or less in shape (Faludi and Van der Valk, 1994). At least that was so until later governments decided to scrap national spatial planning, but that is a different story.

Some Dutch planners, with me following in their wake, cast their eyes on Europe. Expecting a European planning doctrine on the lines of the Dutch equivalent I soon saw was 'a bridge too far' (Faludi, 1996). Instead I

did what I had done before upon arriving in The Netherlands: I looked at what European planners working on what would become the ESDP did and why.

True, I may have all-too-easily accepted the ideal of a United States of Europe. If I may plead mitigating circumstance; so did Dick Williams (1996) to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude for having raised academic interest in European planning. But reading literature on the European project soon taught me otherwise. That literature advanced supranational and intergovernmental models for Europe alluded to above, sometimes concluding that the EU was rather a unique – *sui generis* – construct. Reality gives much credence to the last view, but public opinion perceives a seminal struggle between a non-elected Brussels bent on supranationalism and individuals' own democratic governments defending their turfs.

It was essential to also pay attention to the positions of individual member states. With the Dutch in the lead, some planners had already been eying Europe, but the then European Economic Community had turned a cold shoulder (Zonneveld, 2018). A reinvigorated European Community entered the scene when, under Jacques Delors as President of the European Commission, the Single European Act gave it powers to widen the scope of its extant rudimentary regional policies. In addition, the Single European Act defined economic and social cohesion as common objectives, with relevant competences attached, which is how the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was expanded in scale and also how a Social Fund and a Cohesion Fund were created. These, and other new policies really implied that the areas covered by its members needed to be looked at holistically.

A team at the Commission services considered such matters. Its head was Jean-Charles Leygues, a French Commission official who, as a one-time member, and eventually deputy director of the political cabinet of Jacques Delors had helped formulating what is now known as EU Cohesion Policy in the first instance (Ross, 1995). A select few French and Dutch planners perceived an opportunity to participate in formulating a joint framework. In various capacities, they started working for, and in, the Commission services. But there was no clear sense of the potential future shape of European planning.

Those who had much clearer ideas were member state ministries of finance and/or economic affairs: within guidelines still to be decided, the new funds were to be administered by line ministries like them. Known as 'sector ministries' in planning jargon, these ministries tended – and tend – to side-line planners. As a result, and even more so than before thanks to enhanced funding, these line ministries were about to shape spatial development, but without looking at the broader picture. Providing this broader picture was of course what planners thought they, above all, could and should do.

Line, or sector ministries were already strongly present in Brussels. But there was no formation of ministers responsible for regional policy, let alone spatial planning. Instead, the first meeting of planning ministers - held under the 1989 French Presidency at Nantes - was purely informal and, as a result, was hardly on the radar of European policy makers. Neither planning ministers themselves, nor their advisers were, as the saying goes, 'in the loop' either. The real exceptions to this were the French and Dutch experts mentioned. At the time of the meeting, one of them from France had already been called to work at the Commission. His Dutch colleague with previous experience as a 'national detached expert' at the Commission soon joined him there.

Prompted by Jacques Delors addressing them in person at Nantes, the ministers present agreed to continue their meetings. Soon, a Committee of officials from member states, the 'Committee on Spatial Development' (CSD) gave body and permanence to the effort. But why spatial development? Planning was anathema to the UK's then Conservative government. As a consequence, UK representation insisted on spatial development rather than planning. Others, too, saw advantage in this. It seemed to suggest a broader scope than just regulating, as in classic spatial planning, the use of land. With the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) offering the prospect of actively promoting projects, spatial development seemed the better term.

Jean-Charles Leygues thought the new CSD should become part of what is called Comitology, the label given to the great variety of expert groups which advise the Commission on shaping and administering its policies. Ignoring the difference between spatial development and classic spatial planning, Germany put its foot down:

European treaties did not mention spatial planning, the planners representing it said. This had everything to do with German planning – but not only it – essentially being about allocating land to preferred uses. This is a function of local government subject to the guidance and control of the federal states, or *Länder*. So, Germany has as many planning systems as there are *Länder* – currently sixteen. Within broad parameters, they are free to do as they wish. Truly European planning would have challenged this arrangement, making it anathema to the Germans. Because the European Treaties nowhere mentioned spatial planning, the German argument was that there was no so-called competence for it, and this was their defence against the European Community (or from November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993 the European Union) interfering.

With this argument accepted by other member states, the Germans became active proponents of European spatial planning in an intergovernmental, rather than in a ‘communitarian’ form. This implied that member states themselves, rather than the European Commission would be in the driving seat.

The evolving practice became that, at the discretion of their government, a minister from the country holding the rotating Presidency invited the rest to their home country to pursue an evolving agenda, with the CSD preparing the meetings. In 1993 at Liège in the Walloon Region of Belgium the ministers agreed to create the ESDP. The Commission was reduced to giving assistance, but never forgot that it itself should be in charge.

The treaties did not foresee a spatial planning competence, but the business at hand was spatial development. Here, EU policies had much impact: more balanced development throughout the common territory was even the express purpose of EU regional policy. There were also Trans-European Networks and environmental policies, whilst the Single Market – pursuing, albeit indirectly, the proverbial level playing field – was also about spatial development. All versions of the ESDP pointed to the influence of EU policies. The idea – maybe a pipedream – was that once agreed between them, the member states’ ESDP might frame all relevant EU policies. This was somewhat like the practice of the German *Länder*. Individually and collectively, they would help to shape the policies of the federal government. In fact, at the occasion of the first revision of the Treaty of Maastricht, Germany proposed precisely that: an ESDP formulated under the auspices of the Council of Ministers should become a mandatory framework for relevant EU policies. Nothing came of this. Giving the Council of Ministers what amounted to a right of initiative would have broken the Commission’s treasured monopoly in the matter.

Using its own resources, the Commission issued contracts for area studies and for a comparative studies of the planning systems of the member states of the Community. Maybe it hoped that in the end member states would concede to its usual role of initiating and managing European policy. After all, many of its policies already had much impact on spatial development. Halfway through the process, at a ministerial meeting in Madrid in 1995, the Commission services let the Commissioner for Regional Policy say precisely this: the EU pursued a range of policies relevant to spatial development, so why should the Union not have a strategy for guiding them to some common end? But the Germans stuck to their mantra that spatial planning was not a competence of the Union. Others divined that, if there were such a strategy, it could mean yet more conditions being attached to their use of Structural Funds. Generally, in the wake of the Treaty of Maastricht there was also unease about member states losing control. So European planning remained a matter of intergovernmental cooperation.

This was not about whether the Union was intergovernmental or supranational. What member states were rather saying was that, whatever its nature, the Union had to stay out of spatial planning. But, if it had nothing to do with the Union, why as soon as EU regional policy began to take shape had member states taken the initiative? Why had this not happened before? Why, indeed, in formulating their ‘intergovernmental’ ESDP, were they following the rhythm of six-monthly Presidencies of the Council of Ministers? Why did they invite the Commissioner for Regional Policy to the informal meetings of ministers? Why were they accepting support from the Commission?

The answer is that European spatial planning had of course everything to do with the Union. Indeed, that the Union’s policies should bend more towards the wishes of member states was the express intention of formulating the ESDP.



In this ambivalent constellation, it took planners from the member states until 1999 to finish the ESDP. The Commissioner at the time, Monika Wulf-Mathies from Germany also subscribed to it. The idea was that it would be the beginning of a rolling process of planning. The expectation was that an experimental European research programme – to be financed by the Commission – would provide the sorely lacking evidence base. In due course this would result in the establishment of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON), still going from strength to strength. But there was no direct follow-up to the ESDP.

## 4. Future Expectations

Here I sketch three different takes of the future of the ESDP. One, proven wrong, was of a bright future. Another one, equally wrong, was that the Commission would take over, adopting a comprehensive scheme of reference for its policies. The third – my own, takes a jaundiced view of European integration generally. For reasons to be explained, the scenario – not yet proven wrong – was for 2031.

Concerning the first, bright scenario, this was from a British civil servant, John Zetter. Having represented the UK on the CSD he invoked, in a witty paper given at a seminar of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge, MA, in 2001, a 21<sup>st</sup> meeting of European ministers responsible for spatial development held – he wrote as if he were reporting after the fact – in October 2010 in Nicosia at the invitation of the Cypriot Presidency.<sup>4</sup> The event, he wrote, had been overshadowed by the visit of President Hilary Clinton to Brussels. In Nicosia, the Lithuanian deputy commissioner for regional affairs had represented the Commission. Like Cyprus, Lithuania was not yet an EU member in 2001, and there are no deputy commissioners. However, the expectation at the time was that with enlargement not all member states would have a commissioner each, so maybe John Zetter expected deputy commissioners to be created as a concession to those who did not have one.

A seasoned participant in the ESDP process, Zetter expected European spatial planning in due course to result in a veritable European Spatial Development Strategy (ESDS), in effect an exercise in strategic planning' (2002, p.180). This may also have been the hope and expectation of the Commission services, about which more below. Reflecting on what had led to this positive turn of events, Zetter reminisced about a tenth anniversary of the ESDP on 11 May, 2009 – then of course still in the future. The meeting he divined had been at Nantes where the ESDP process had started - by that time no less than twenty years earlier:

The decade had been a good one for European spatial planning. (...) Although hope springs eternal in the planner's breast, to continue for another ten years at such a peak was unlikely. Still, vast quantities of the Loire-Aquitaine speciality – veal escalope – were consumed, washed down with copious amounts of the local Muscadet. The 1999 vintage had been a good one and had kept well. (Zetter, 2002, p.91)

Whether John Zetter had in fact tasted the 1999 Muscadet I don't know. For the rest his was a series of educated guesses. They were subsequently proven to be wrong: there has never been a worthy follow-up to the ESDP. Contrary to expectations, there was no more Commission support. Instead, under Wulf-Mathies' successor, Michael Barnier from France, the Commission took the German's insistence on the Union not having a competence for spatial planning as land-use planning as read, and repudiated all ambition for such a role. Instead, it promoted a new treaty objective and a competence for territorial cohesion. This was to be much closer to France's '*aménagement du territoire*' which is more about purposeful intervention, mostly by means of (state) investments into spatial development. Rather than going into the details of why and how (but see Faludi, 2005, 2007) I outline this second scenario, but not before describing briefly how national planners, most of whom had been involved in the making of the ESDP, were trying to find their feet. In the face of Barnier's initiative to launch an EU territorial Cohesion Policy, in 2007 they prepared the Territorial Agenda, followed by an update in 2011 to tag onto the Europe 2020 programme of the European Council (European Commission, 2010). Both versions of the Territorial Agenda were positioning the member states in relation to this new discourse. But both EU territorial Cohesion Policy and the 2007 Territorial Agenda were caught in a quagmire of institutional reform; the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, being aborted amidst mounting

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4 Note that at the time Cyprus was not yet an EU member.



distrust in the institutions and the very idea of European integration. Little has been heard of European spatial planning in whichever form since.

Now to the second scenario. Perhaps unbeknown to him, at the time Zetter was writing his paper, Jean-Charles Leygues was working on a very different future for a quite different form of European spatial planning, one that was meant to actively promote, as under *aménagement du territoire*, spatial development, but under the new territorial cohesion flag. This was very early in the 2000s when *European Governance: A White Paper* (European Communities, 2001) was under preparation. No less than 10 working groups provided background material for this, and it was meant to be a guide to the future of the Union drawn up more or less in parallel with preparing the ill-fated Treaty on a Constitution for Europe. In particular, Working Group 4c reported on 'Multi-level governance: linking and networking the various regional and local levels'. By that time, the Deputy-Director General of the Directorate General Regional Policy, Jean-Charles Leygues, chaired Working Group 4c and was also its rapporteur. Had things worked out differently, in other words, had the Constitutional Treaty been accepted and territorial cohesion become an EU competence in 2005 – and had Barnier remained as Commissioner of Regional Policy – these ideas might very well have been turned into practice.

The proposition of Working Group 4c was a 'European scheme of reference for sustainable development and economic, social and territorial cohesion' (European Communities, 2002, p.14), no less, and no more. One can guess that some of this had already been in Leygues' mind when discussions on the ESDP started in 1989. However, nothing has been heard of such a scheme since. Times have been hard, not only on planning, but also on Leygues who soon had to make room for new recruits for top positions from the new member states, in this particular case from Slovakia. The fate of the Constitutional Treaty, with territorial cohesion in it, I need no longer labour.

As to the third scenario; my own, this was formulated in 2010, the year when Zetter had set the Nicosia meeting in his earlier future gazing piece. The paper on which my scenario was based had been presented first at a conference held in 2006. The occasion had been the retirement of Klaus Kunzmann, the eminent pioneer of European spatial planning from Dortmund University. He had challenged me to break with my usual habit of exploring the minutiae of European planning and to look boldly into the future. The date – 2031 – I set for the day of the conference celebrating his retirement, but twenty-five years hence.

Retrospectively, this seems like the breaking point in my thinking about European planning. Having followed the making of the ESDP and the Commission's subsequent answer to member states' reluctance to give it a planning role, I had come to question whether European spatial planning, indeed European integration as such, were in any way self-evident. So, in 2006 I divined that by 2031 the ESDP would be but a distant memory. It had taken the diligent effort, I wrote, of a young Azerbaijani to dig it out from the archives. For this he received an award from the Pan-Eurasian Council for the Economy (PEACE). At its Odessa meeting, he was therefore allowed, I wrote, to give a short speech. In it he warned that the EU's demise in the years before – yes, I was talking about its demise before it had become fashionable to speculate on it (see Zielonka, 2014; Krastev, 2017) – might at least in part have been due to its not heeding the messages of the ESDP. The Azerbaijani impetuously concluded on behalf of the 1,000 Friends of EurAsia of which he was a member that there was an urgent need for the making of a EurAsian Spatial Development Perspective (EASDP). At which point, fortuitously, a failure of the automated translation system provided the opportunity to usher him out of the room (Faludi, 2010, p.202).

The remainder of my 2006 paper was about overlapping networks and fuzzy identities prevailing in 2031, thoughts that had germinated in my mind over the years. They would crystallise in my confronting, in Faludi (2020 [2018]), what I call territorialism.

## 5. More on Fuzziness

The quote by Elkins at the beginning of this paper discusses sovereignty and territoriality, both of which relate to a state's monopoly on coercive force and the allocation of values. But times change:

Not only have market systems penetrated all countries (...) but international 'globalization' of economic relations has placed many economic functions beyond the control of nations (...) Likewise, political organizations at the local or regional level and at the supra-national level compete with nations for the allegiance of citizens (...)

In short, the territoriality of political, economic, and cultural life has been shattered (...) The particular way in which most aspects of our lives have been bundled or packaged in containers called nation-states have been increasingly challenged and subtly eroded. (Elkins, 1995, p.15)

Elkins concludes that territoriality is 'the centrepiece, the keystone, the first among many changes in this exploration of the past and the future', following this by saying that, to highlight its taken-for-granted nature, he offers 'a vision of another world premised on the relaxation of assumptions about territoriality' (Elkins, 1995, p.17).

Elkins also sees a decline of territory, believing:

that we are passing into a new historical epoch in which non-territorial citizenship may seem as 'natural' or 'given' as citizenship in a territorial nation-state did for the past century or more. (...) There is room for many visions, but if one grants that this particular vision *could* come true, then I have accomplished all that I really wanted to demonstrate: we have taken an awful lot for granted, and these tectonic assumptions may have blinded us to the world in which we already live. (Elkins, 1995, p.39)

This is really like Balligand and Maquart (1990, p.25) already quoted for identifying an inherent need for the state to have borders, pointing at the same time to other logics, such as the logic of the merchant. Accordingly, nothing must be in the way of covering the whole world:

[O]ne can always hope to increase the surplus value generated by trade by increasing the quantity and diversity of supply and demand and pursue more and more linkages. Much as the territory of the farmer is small and of necessity constrained and in principle the territory of the sovereign is constrained, hence limited, too, by the concept of borders, that of the logic of trade altogether negates space alongside with borders. Its calling is to expand to cover the whole world: this is what we live through now.<sup>5</sup> (author's translation)

Being themselves directly or indirectly involved in French planning, Balligand as a politician and Maquart as a senior civil servant, they add thoughtfully: 'Is this still the nation-state of which France was one of the most advanced examples? Or is this Europe, or are these yet other forms of political power asking to be invented?'<sup>6</sup> (1990, p.29 author's translation).

I came across their work only recently. An earlier, decisive influence on my thinking was Jan Zielonka asking 'Is the EU Doomed?' (Zielonka, 2014). So I turned to writing the book, already mentioned, under the title of *The Poverty of Territorialism: A Neo-Medieval View of Europe and European Planning* (Faludi, 2020 [2018]). In it I launched the idea, more of a metaphor, discussed next.

5 [O]n peut toujours espérer augmenter la plus-value liée à l'échange en accroissant la quantité et la diversité de l'offre et de la demande, en suscitant toujours davantage de mises en relations. Alors que le territoire du paysan est petit et nécessairement borné, alors que le territoire de souveraineté est fondamentalement déterminé par la notion de frontière, donc borné lui aussi, celui de la logique marchande nie aussi bien l'espace que toute frontière. Il a vocation à s'étendre au monde entier : nous le vivons aujourd'hui. (Jean-Pierre Balligand, Daniel Maquart, 1990, p. 25).

6 Est-ce encore l'État-nation dont la France fut une des réalisations les plus achevées ? Ou est-ce l'Europe, ou bien encore d'autres formes du pouvoir politique, qui restent à inventer ? (*Ibid.* p. 29).

## 6. The European Archipelago

My latest book (Faludi, 2020 [2018]) proposes metaphors for thinking about European space and planning in novel ways. The one I am expanding on here is member states being conceived of as islands forming an archipelago (see also Faludi, 2013, 2019). Relations between them are obviously mediated by the sea between them. Islanders cannot hope to prosper without having their eyes constantly on it and the opportunities and threats which it offers.

But should the whole island group be one polity? The answer depends on what the shape of the archipelago is, the number and diversity of the islands, the distances, physical and mental between them are, whether islanders speak the same or similar languages, have the same or similar outlooks, endowments and relations with the world beyond the outer limits of the archipelago. The question could also be put as follows: should each island, framed by its shores as it is, be a sovereign entity? If so, then, as with states, the relations between islands take second place. Alternatively, should the group be governed as a whole with what under the Law of the Sea is called a baseline around them, in so doing ignoring that each island is different in size, has different endowments and occupies a different position within the archipelago, making the inhabitants have outlooks and concerns more or less distinct from those of others?

One might ask of course whether it is at all appropriate to compare states with islands. Most states about other states and some of them are landlocked, with no access to the sea. But their being sovereign implies that they are a law to themselves: that they are akin to islands. Individually, their territories are often portrayed on maps as if suspended in space: islands. States may even wish to be seen as islands; as self-sufficient. This is their ideal: being sovereign, self-sufficient, masters of their own fate. Which makes viewing states as islands a suitable metaphor, simply because of what sovereignty means: the exclusion of the outside; as Bertrand Badie in the quote above has shown: in the pursuit of national advantage being able to defy suggestions to compromise.

The analogy is the more appropriate since it highlights the flaws in how we ideally see sovereign states. After all, the last thing islands should do is to cut themselves off from the surrounding sea. Which is why challenging somebody for disregarding his or her position and real interests by saying: 'You are not on an island' misapprehends what islands and islanders really are: they must not isolate themselves. They must rather appreciate the advantage of being surrounded by the sea. After all, it has been maritime states and island nations that have explored and derived much benefit from trade.

Indeed, the core message contained in the metaphor of states as islands forming an archipelago is to appreciate that the sea of relations surrounding them provides opportunities. It is not only the relations with islands and their inhabitants in the same group from which they benefit; with the sea being without bounds, but they also benefit globally. With Balligand and Maquart (1990) we might say, they are in an ideal position to be traders.

Perhaps less obviously, what has been said about islands and the opportunities that the sea offers has more general applications. No doubt the sea offers advantages in terms of access, but likewise the connectedness of our present world, with road, rail and air transport and, not to forget, the ether, hardly bears special emphasis. Unless it chooses to be, no state is in fact landlocked any more, not in any real sense of the word. All have infinitely more access to other states than ever before. Moreover, as with islands finding and maintaining trade routes that suit their own purposes, presently each state must make choices as to which contacts to develop and why. Importantly, as time goes by, relations become institutionalised, taking the form perhaps of governance networks, much like the Hanseatic League of old. To invoke Balligand and Maquart once more, they juxtapose the Hansa to the Jacobine state which, according to them, is a thing of the past. Sovereignty in the sense of controlling one's own territory within fixed borders is no longer the only game in town; governing a network of relations is.

Of course, relations are anything but uniform. Some patterns involve two or more neighbouring islands, others more distant ones, but with complementary endowments. Some relations will be of a permanent nature, and some intermittent, whereas others will be one-offs. The point surely is that whatever provisions they require, individual islands, as with whole groups of them, need to engage in planning in multiple configurations. But

there is unlikely to be room – nor indeed a need for – overall planning. It becomes questionable even whether identifying archipelagos as distinct from the world-wide network of relations makes sense. Which of course does not mean that there is no more need for planning, only that we must accept that it will be disjointed.

## 7. Conclusion

Perhaps naively, with others I dreamt about European spatial planning. As indicated, the Dutch were talking in such terms until the representative of the UK insisted on European spatial development being the flag hoisted. It did not matter. What was meant by 'European' was the real problem.

Of course, it was the planning, or if you want, the spatial development of the European Community, now the European Union that was meant. But what that EU may do is determined by its member states concluding intergovernmental treaties. None mentions spatial planning nor spatial development. If one had, the European Commission could have taken relevant initiatives. This might have led to something like an EU policy in the matter but, as the example of European territorial Cohesion Policy shows, such an outcome is no foregone conclusion. The competence for territorial cohesion has not led to anything like Zetter's European Spatial Development Strategy.

The reason for this lies in the EU's institutional setup. Commonly discussed in terms of whether the EU is supranational or intergovernmental, clearly, supranational – like a federal state – it is not. But member states have given it so many powers and equipped it with such an extensive apparatus that the term 'intergovernmental' no longer fits the bill either. As a result, it is often said that it is *sui generis*: a category to itself. Which really means: difficult to fathom. This indeterminacy of the EU means that it shifts and changes as the winds blow. Presently, the EU experiences head winds. But maybe the offer of another – neo-medieval – view of European integration could help us to relax. Maybe viewing European space, not as a vast administrative-legal territory to be defended from behind its borders, but rather as an archipelago where the sea gives superb access to the islands and to the wider world does the trick. In terms of the European Union being either an intergovernmental or a supranational construct, it should be clear that I give support to neither view. Rather, I give credence to the alternative of it being *sui generis* – unique in a legal-constitutional sense, but as such maybe, just maybe, a harbinger of things to come.

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

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## 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*

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## 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

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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.

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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.



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# **BEYOND 2020: MOVING FROM OBJECTIVES TO GOVERNANCE TO MASTER EVER MORE PRESSING CHALLENGES**

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## **Abstract**

The adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030, some 20 years after the adoption of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (European Commission, 1999) presents an opportunity to both look back on what has been achieved and envisage developments for the next 20 years. This paper starts with some personal reflections on the aspirations put forward in the ESDP and some key achievements. The main part of the paper then concentrates on what might be done differently over the next 20 years. It is argued that because the world has changed substantially since 1999 it is time to breathe new life into the original objectives of the ESDP and support them with clear governance and implementation tools. Furthermore, the geographical coverage ought to be extended to cover the Western Balkans. The final section offers an outlook on what we might want to see when looking back again 20 years from now.

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## 1. The Aspirations of 1999

In 1999 the European Spatial Development Perspective was published following years of intergovernmental cooperation which began during the French Presidency of the European Council in 1989 (Williams, 1996; Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). The ESDP was a rather unique document, “one of a kind” and as such questions can be raised about its nature and aspirations. While Rusca (1998, p.37) perceives it as both a ‘strange animal’ and a ‘Bible’ and ‘user guide’, Faludi describes it as ‘the mother of all documents... albeit ‘no masterplan’ (Faludi, 2010a, p.106) and a document whose significance was difficult to predict (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). Williams (1998, p.61) even described the ESDP as ‘the end of the beginning’.

Are we any wiser today, 20 years after the final adoption of the ESDP? While the process which led to the ESDP set out to develop a vision for European space, it resulted in a document which in the view of many elevated spatial planning to a European level and introduced policy aims such as polycentric development and a new urban-rural partnership. In total the ESDP document introduced no less than 60 policy options – most of which are so timeless that they are still valid 20 years later. The underlying aim of the ESDP, to push the EU towards a more balanced and sustainable development of its territory, is still valid today, not least given the territorial impacts of COVID-19.

As will be discussed later, it seems that the achievement of this aim is becoming ever more distant and one may even ask what the ESDP actually achieved given the increasing levels of spatial fragmentation in Europe (Böhme et al., 2019). I would argue that the ESDP has achieved a lot, although it is difficult to provide a counterfactual analysis of what might have happened if there had been no ESDP. Nonetheless, below I shall outline some of what I consider important achievements of the ESDP.

At the European level, transnational cooperation programmes (Interreg) emerged and started to flourish in the wake of the ESDP. Most prominently, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) was set up as a programme providing Europe-wide comparable territorial evidence for policy processes. It also created a ‘spatial planning’ community stretching across more than 32 countries and helped bridge the gaps between scientific research and policy-making communities (Böhme, 2016; Böhme and Schön, 2006). Initiated by the ESDP, and finally pushed forward by ESPON, territorial impact assessments (TIA) of European policies have developed from an obscure idea into an accepted practice (Böhme and Eser, 2008; Medeiros, 2014; Essig and Kaucic, 2017). More importantly, without the ESDP, territorial cohesion would not have made it into the European Treaty of Lisbon as a declared objective of European policies together with social and economic cohesion (see e.g. Schön, 2005, 2009; Faludi, 2007; Waterhout, 2007; Böhme and Eser, 2011; Bradley and Zaucha, 2017).

At national level, the ESDP had a variable influence on planning practices from local to national levels. Spatial planners and spatial planning documents especially started to stretch beyond their administrative borders and place their territories in a wider spatial context. Moreover, the changing understanding of planning, and the topics addressed in spatial planning, were in part influenced by the ESDP. In some areas one may even talk about ‘discursive integration’ (Böhme, 2006). There are a wide range of studies and articles which consider how the ESDP influenced planning practices in EU Member States and even beyond (see e.g. Böhme, 2002; Zetter, 2002; Buunk, 2003; Rivolin, 2003; Shaw and Sykes, 2003; Waterhout et al., 2009; Stead and Nadin, 2011; ESPON, 2018). The ESDP also changed the day-to-day tasks and career paths of spatial planners in Europe. The Europeanisation of planning work and CVs now reaches from university education to planning cooperation across national borders and participation in international spatial planning communities (Williams, 1996; Rusca, 1998; Böhme, 2002; Faludi, 2010a) defining more distinctly European biographies (Faludi, 2010a).

Despite all this, there remains an air of doubt around the actual meaning and achievements of the ESDP. Summing up spatial development perspectives for Europe between 1972 and 1997, Kunzmann (1998) asked whether the ESDP was perhaps naïve and ‘much ado about nothing’. Similarly, in an earlier publication working on the same lines, Zillmer and Böhme pondered whether European planning really only existed somewhere between European fruit baskets (i.e. with ‘blue bananas’ and ‘bunches of grapes’) and ‘paper tigers’ (Böhme and Zillmer, 2010). This observation being based on the insight that, aside from many fine words, it seems there

is little political appetite to give impetus to European spatial planning or territorial cohesion. On the contrary, it all remains rather voluntary and intangible with a lot of small-scale examples of practice, but hardly any claim to actually be achieving a more balanced development of the European territory (Böhme, Holstein, et al., 2015; European Commission, 2015b). Is it all too much of a 'brainy' exercise which does not engage people? And as it ostensibly promotes 'ordering the territory of the EU according to a set of spatial imaginations or visions' (Jensen and Richardson, 2004, p.3), is it still searching for answers to the questions raised by Jørgensen (1998) – 'What has love got to do with it?', or by Jancic (2005) 'Why so shy?'

## 2. Considerations for 2020-2039

Since the ESDP, intergovernmental cooperation in the field of spatial planning has continued, and a revised Territorial Agenda 2030 was adopted in December 2020 during the German EU Presidency. So, what are the key considerations to keep in mind for the next 20 years up to 2039?

The starting point for the debate on a Territorial Agenda 2030 is the current Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020, agreed by the ministers responsible for the Spatial Planning and Territorial Development in 2011 (MSPTD, 2011). This updated and reviewed the first Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2007 (MUDTCEU, 2007), which was itself based on the ESDP.

The current Territorial Agenda 2020 provides strategic policy orientations for territorial development and underlines the territorial dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – the successor of the Lisbon Strategy adopted by the European Council in 2010 (European Commission, 2010). The Territorial Agenda 2020 identified six priorities for future territorial development in the EU:

- Promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development.
- Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions.
- Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions.
- Ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies.
- Improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises.
- Managing and connecting ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions.

Being essentially an intergovernmental policy, member states and EU institutions have a shared responsibility for implementing the Territorial Agenda. Its complexity, abstract character and the lack of implementation mechanisms increases the weakness of the Territorial Agenda and undermines its strategic value (Böhme, Holstein, et al., 2015). This is closely related to the fact that cooperation on territorial matters takes place mainly in the intergovernmental realm, and this is not always the most straightforward vehicle for implementation. It largely depends on available resources and the priorities of member states, which often diverge (*ibid.*). The reality is that the relevance of the Territorial Agenda in public policy decision making is gradually decreasing (Medeiros, 2016).

This raises the question of what ought to be different in the revised Territorial Agenda that was tabled in late 2020? Are the objectives and topics addressed still attracting political interest? Is the approach on how to address the objectives and topics clear? Has an approach to governing and implementing the Agenda been decided?

### 2.1. Reviving and Updating Territorial Cohesion Objectives

The objectives and topics addressed in the ESDP and the successive Territorial Agendas are still relevant and possibly even more so than they were 20 years ago. The original thinking was very much based on a social planning understanding, and placed emphasis on balanced development, cohesion and some degree of spatial equality. While general European policy discourse – as expressed in the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission, 2010), for example – has shifted away from cohesion and towards supporting growth poles and hoping for spill-over effects to the rest of the territory, the Territorial Agendas have remained committed to balanced development and territorial cohesion.

The world has changed substantially since the adoption of the ESDP and even the most recent Territorial Agenda (2011). The financial crisis of the late 2000s, COVID-19, migration, climate change, and digitalisation have all shaped our world (and the policy environment) rapidly. These changes have contributed to increased societal and territorial fragmentation (ESPON, 2019b), something that can be seen in emerging notions such as 'places left behind' (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018), 'places of discontent' (Dijkstra et al., 2018), or a 'diverse European geography of territorial futures' (Böhme et al., 2019). The emerging discourse about 'places left behind' in particular suggests that we have reached a point where ideas supporting balanced development and cohesion need to come back to the forefront of policy to ensure we are not putting the achievements of European integration at risk. The return of territorial cohesion objectives will undoubtedly shape the future well-being of people living in Europe, and its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In other words, the overall objectives and ideas of the ESDP and Territorial Agendas seem set to become even more relevant in the years to come, as current development trends, such as in the fields of pandemic-responses, technology, economy, demography and climate, risk increasing spatial disparities even further. In fact, these trends make an even stronger case for re-emphasising the objectives articulated in the previous Territorial Agenda documents.

In terms of territorial focus, importance has shifted increasingly towards functional areas (ESPON, 2017), soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries (Faludi, 2010b; Haughton et al., 2010; Allmendinger et al., 2014), and post-territorial approaches to planning (Faludi, 2018). All this requires a new take on understanding and approaching a revived objective of territorial cohesion and balanced development. The Territorial Agenda 2030 makes a step in that direction.<sup>1</sup> Its strapline – 'a future for all places' – recognises the need to address the growing inequalities between places and people as well as unsustainable development which has reached a critical level in Europe. In that sense it approaches territorial cohesion in a more contemporary manner and defines two overarching objectives, a Just Europe and a Green Europe. These are further broken down into six priorities Table 1 / Figure 1:

Table 1: Objectives and Priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Just Europe that offers future perspectives for all places and people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Balanced Europe: Better balanced territorial development utilising Europe's diversity</li> <li>o Functional Regions: Convergent local and regional development, less inequality between places</li> <li>o Integration Beyond Borders: Easier living and working across national borders</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A Green Europe that protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Healthy Environment: Better ecological livelihoods and climate-neutral and resilient towns, cities and regions</li> <li>o Circular Economy: Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world</li> <li>o Sustainable Connections: Sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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## Objectives and Priorities

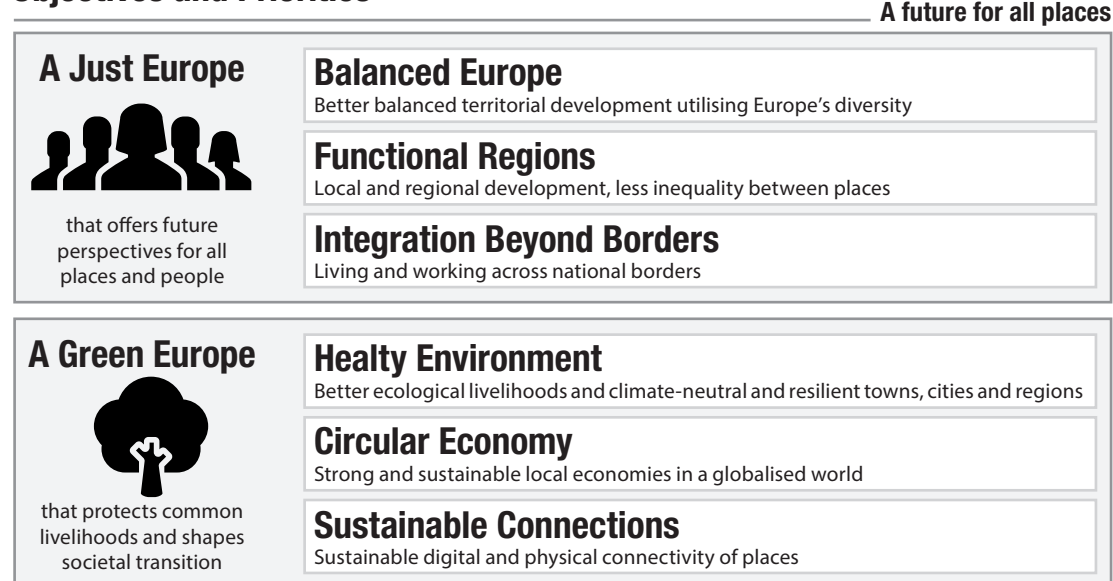


Figure 1 - Objectives and Priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030  
Source: [www.territorialagenda.eu](http://www.territorialagenda.eu)

<sup>1</sup> See [www.territorialagenda.eu](http://www.territorialagenda.eu).



## 2.2. Equipping Territorial Cohesion Objectives with Strong Governance Approaches

The approach to addressing objectives and topics outlined in the ESDP and Territorial Agendas is in need of reconsideration. Addressing the objectives is not an easy task, and requires many different players to come together. This has been the weak point of the process since the very beginning. While the spatial planning community highlighted the relevant issues, it failed to mobilise sufficient action to generate change. Therefore, ESPON (2019b) argues that the next Territorial Agenda could benefit from fresh wording. More broadly, the most important innovation would be to turn away from a single Agenda document and towards an understanding in which the Territorial Agenda is seen as a long-term policy process in the form of a framework for action. In short, this framework should have two pillars or pathways, one focusing on bottom-up territorial visions and one on cooperation between places, sectors and societal groups.

### 2.2.1. A New Need for Territorial Visions

No one actor can address the challenges ahead or realise bottom-up visions single-handedly. Europe needs stronger cooperation between places, sector policies, and societal groups across geographical levels. This requires high quality governance and the capacity of many players to engage in visioning and cooperation efforts. To achieve this, many players and places might need capacity-building and empowerment (Rodríguez-Pose, 2020).

Territorial visions were particularly in vogue around 20 years ago. A good example would be the work carried out by VASAB – Visions and Strategies around the Baltic Sea (VASAB secretariat, 1994). Tatzberger (2006) discussed the essential role of ‘vision’ in European spatial development. Since then, the appetite for spatial visions and, in particular, spatial visions which transcend larger areas and national borders has declined. Recently there have not been so many prominent examples of these, with initiatives such as the common future vision for the German-Polish Interaction Area, developed by the Spatial Development Committee of the German-Polish Governmental Commission for Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation (2016), or the cross-border spatial vision for Greater-Luxembourg, currently under preparation, being notable exceptions. The absence of a shared vision for the European territory of tomorrow is increasingly becoming an issue. It implies an absence of a common ground on which to bring together various sector policies, as well as a lack of guidance which can enable local and regional development to be placed in a larger context (Böhme and Toptsidou, 2017; Mehlbye et al., 2019).

Besides a top-down Europe-wide vision, there is also a need for diverse and multifaceted bottom-up visions for functional areas in Europe. These can be smaller functional rural areas, functional regions, functional urban areas, cross-border functional areas, or transnational or macro-regional functional areas. Depending on the function addressed, the area may be rather diverse. To bring Europe closer to the citizens and ensure that all places and parts of society are included, Europe needs diverse and multifaceted bottom-up visions for its places and functional regions. These need to be realistic, place-based and include links to a wider European perspective. The visions may be multifaceted and even diverge from mainstream policy ideas about growth and innovation (Martin et al., 2018; Mehlbye et al., 2019). Faludi, in his latest book (Faludi, 2018), argued that moving towards a post-territorial Europe means that each functional area needs to actively manage its links with other functional areas in Europe. For this it will need a clear vision about its own future in relation to other places.

Sadly, the Territorial Agenda 2030 does not offer a strong spatial vision for Europe. Rather, the vision is implicitly provided in the aims ‘a Europe which holds positive future perspectives for all people’, and the idea of a just and green Europe. This might, however, provide a framework and some stimulus for further debate on how such a Europe might look. In a perfect world, this debate would be part of the dialogue and conference on the future of Europe launched by the European Commission in 2020. More realistically, though, this debate might be taken forward by planners at various levels scales and by academics researching and debating different facets of how this implicit vision might be more concretely manifested.



### 2.2.2. A New Need for Cooperation

In an increasingly complex world, where growing interdependencies imply that decisions taken in one place affect the development outlook of other places and vice versa, there are not many things left that can be addressed single-handedly. For many years, the focus on multilevel governance and territorial governance (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Böhme, Zillmer, et al., 2015; European Commission, 2015a; Alcantara et al., 2016) has illustrated that spatial planning and territorial development are tasks that require the cooperation of many scales and actors. The need to develop more approaches to cooperation is once again being emphasised, as the simple reality is that resolving future development challenges requires cooperation (ESPON, 2017, 2019a; Mehlbye and Böhme, 2017).

The new calls for cooperation go substantially beyond the idea of cooperation as reflected in European spatial planning over the past decades. Often cooperation is focused on European Territorial Cooperation programmes, widely known as Interreg, which have become the *de facto* EU approach to supporting territorial cooperation. It can even be argued that they have become a rather isolated (sector) policy. It relies on a committed, yet small, professional community that is rather dispersed and disconnected in how it champions a stronger drive for cooperation beyond Interreg. This rather limited presence and profile has perpetuated the tension between 'place-blind' and 'place-based' policies (Barca et al., 2012), making it hard to consider the impacts different policies might be producing in relation to further social and economic fragmentation. Consequently, one can state that the territorial dimension in EU policies has been increasingly overlooked and the role cooperation could play in addressing different challenges has been undervalued.

Another important point stresses cooperation as a bottom-up approach to policy making in functional areas. This approach is gaining momentum in local, regional and national policy making, not least because it offers a response to the current 'distance' between citizens and policy making. Cooperation actions can also be channelled and tailored across different places and levels, responding to the need to address functional rather than administrative areas.

Cooperation in Europe should be strategically positioned as a key enabler to respond to challenges and address opportunities, various interdependencies and mismatches of territorial functionalities. ESPON (2019b) stresses that this approach to cooperation is not limited to European Territorial Cooperation programmes but takes a much broader approach:

- **Cooperation between places (addressing flows):** Cooperation between different places or territorial entities can help to address interdependencies between territories. This is directly linked to addressing flows between places – including both the 'flow of spaces' and the 'space of flows' (Blatter, 2004) – and understanding places not as separate islands but as webs or networks with considerable flows. Developments in one place depend on the flows between it and other places and thus on the development in other places. Innovative cooperation forms can reduce the mismatch between the geography of decision making and the geography of the phenomenon addressed. By better addressing challenges at local and regional level, it can also help in tackling territorial fragmentation. Cooperation is relevant at any geographical level – between and within places, municipalities, regions, countries, and diverse kinds of functional areas.
- **Cooperation between policy sectors:** Cooperation is not limited to territorial entities. Players from different policy sectors cooperating and adopting a more integrated perspective can help in addressing interdependencies, fragmentation and mismatches in functionalities. Improving sector coordination and overcoming the silo structures of policy making – such as in public administration and business organisations – might facilitate the development of more powerful, integrated policy responses to key challenges. This type of cooperation may take the form of impact assessments which illustrate mutual interlinkages and comment on the impact of other sector policies.
- **Cooperation between societal groups:** Cooperation between different groups to overcome social fragmentation (which can be observed across groups with different income levels, social status, mobility options, cultural characteristics or religious backgrounds), could provide new directions for supporting European integration. Indeed, to a large degree the challenge of social fragmentation caused by increasing regional disparities and (real and perceived) inequalities, can be seen as spatial expressions of an increasingly fragmented economy and society in Europe. Cooperation in this area may involve any societal group, and can support citizens in interacting with people outside their usual communities and peer groups.

In principle, these three types of cooperation have been emphasised in the context of multilevel governance for some decades already (Bache and Flinders, 2004; ESPON, 2014; European Commission, 2015a). They are closely related to the aspiration to reduce disparities in the quality of government and institutional capacities across European institutions. Good government is both an objective of, and a precondition for, successful cooperation.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 places more emphasis on implementation compared to its predecessors. It underlines the need for cooperation between a wide range of players to achieve its aim. It also emphasises the need to strengthen: multi-level governance; place-based approaches; coordinated sector policy territorial impacts and coherence; cooperation between territories; territorial cohesion at European level; territorial cohesion at cross-border, transnational, inter- and intraregional levels; and, Member State and neighbouring country contributions to territorial cohesion.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 calls upon a range of different players and asks them explicitly to contribute within their regular mandates to achieving the priorities it sets out. As an intergovernmental document, it has neither legal nor financial means to facilitate its implementation. It relies on persuasive powers and the support and good will of interested players. To underline their willingness to put the Territorial Agenda into practice, a number of national and regional players across Europe have come together and developed six pilot, or showcase, actions which they will implement in the course of 2021 and 2022.<sup>2</sup> The hope is that this will inspire others and thus trigger multiple actions putting the Territorial Agenda into practice.

### **2.2.3. A New Need to Look Beyond EU Boundaries and Include the Western Balkans**

The geographical coverage of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is also an issue. In 1999, there was a need to reflect the planned 2004 enlargement in the ESDP (Finka, 2001). After some discussion, the ESDP, addressing mainly the then 15 EU member states, was enriched by a special chapter on accession countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the same way, the Territorial Agenda also ought to look beyond the current set of member states, as territorial developments in the EU influence developments outside the EU and vice versa. Particular attention should be given to the Western Balkans (Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo) to support their further European integration and ambitions to improve territorial governance in these countries.

Many of the challenges outlined and addressed by the Territorial Agenda are also valid in the Western Balkans, albeit often in more fundamental terms. In particular, the governance dimension of spatial planning is a key concern for the Western Balkans, where there is a need to empower civil society players at local and regional levels to enhance public policy making. In light of the prospect of future European integration, issues such as the rule of law, weak and uncompetitive economies, bilateral disputes, and challenges related to territorial governance need to be addressed at this crucial stage in their development (Berisha et al., 2018; Cotella, 2018; Western Balkan Network on Territorial Governance, 2018).

Supporting cooperation between places, policy sectors and societal groups (as well as bottom-up territorial visions) can prove a useful approach in strengthening territorial governance and European integration efforts in the Western Balkans. Including the Western Balkans in the Territorial Agenda would thus not only fill an awkward 'white spot' on the European map and acknowledge the development interdependencies between places in the EU and the Western Balkans, it would also support bottom-up integration processes.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 does not explicitly address the Western Balkans. However, it encourages everyone involved in spatial planning and territorial development policies at all administrative and governance levels in the EU and neighbouring countries to take note of the Territorial Agenda and to put it into practice. This is not an exclusively EU-centric agenda but is open to the inclusion of other interested countries.

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2 For more information on the pilot actions see <https://territorialagenda.eu/actions.html>

### 3. Outlook post 2039

This special issue looks back at 20 years of the ESDP. Many of the objectives formulated more than 20 years ago are still valid, and the challenges identified appear to be even more pressing today than then. Therefore, it is time to gear up to meet these. To do so, a focus on governance and implementation mechanisms seems most pressing. As a thought experiment, assume that it is possible to update the Territorial Agenda and equip it with a successful governance process. What could Europe look like 20 years from now, when the ESDP would turn 40? Would it have:

- Overcome Europe's territorial and societal fragmentation by embracing Europe's diversity, fostering a multitude of options for places to develop depending on their inherent potential and their ideas for a desirable future?
- Delivered territorial cohesion through 'intangibles' rather than focusing on tangible results in terms of infrastructure investments, or innovation and growth initiatives?
- Fostered high quality governments and governance processes at all geographical levels which engage with flexible governance solutions and multi-level territorial governance at the level of functional areas?
- Endowed local players with the capacity and empowerment to engage in flexible governance processes, embedding policies in larger geographical contexts?

With such themes in mind, and looking both backwards and forwards, the article closes with invited comments from three 'Territorial Thinkers'<sup>3</sup> who were involved in the development of the ESDP and are still active in giving a voice to territorial concerns in European policy making:

**Peter Mehlbye:** "An envisaged revival of current territorial cohesion objectives and the territorial priorities of the TA should, on the one hand, include changes and updates responding to the new territorial challenges and (more global) realities. On the other hand, it is crucial that the territorial cohesion objectives and Territorial Agenda 2030's strategic orientation is appealing and understandable for policy makers at different levels and in different places. Furthermore, a third priority should be considered in the Territorial Agenda 2030 process – namely updating the overall strategic orientations for the development of the European territory and explaining in greater detail what they could imply for different types of territories, regions and cities, and making use of the latest ESPON findings. This would support consistency, and benefit the bottom-up visions and their implementation through improved governance structures. Without some (soft) European level strategic guidance, the risk is a dispersed implementation that afterwards might not be considered in line with the territorial priorities set out in a Territorial Agenda 2030. Finally, solid communication and a dialogue about the long-term aspirations for the European territory as such would improve the uptake and use by places, sectors and societal groups, and thereby stimulate the chances for success of a Territorial Agenda 2030".

**Karl Peter Schön:** "Growing inequalities and social fragmentation are – besides climate change – in my view the most challenging factors in European development these days. Fragmentation is the main source of discontent and disintegration and is a danger not just for established parties, which are losing voters' support, but potentially even for democracy and cohesion in Europe. Already 20 years ago, the ESDP was triggered by the challenges caused by growing disparities in Europe, and promoted a more balanced and polycentric development in Europe, to be implemented through an integrative European territorial policy. These activities eventually led to a new aim in the Lisbon EU Treaty of 2009: Territorial Cohesion. However, until now, neither the Commission nor the member states made full use of this shared competence. It is necessary to further develop the joint implementation of territorial cohesion by both Commission and member states (and their regions and cities) including broad public discourses and multi-level visions and strategies for more territorial cohesion and less inequality and social fragmentation in Europe. The ESDP of 1999 was the first European territorial document which was later complemented by the Territorial Agendas of 2007 and 2011, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (2007) and more recently the Urban Agenda for the EU (2016) and the New Urban Agenda of the United Nations (2016). All of them have a focus on territories, smaller and larger, urban and non-urban, and on space and the built environment. It is time now that these diverse or different agenda processes grow together".

3 See [www.territorialthinkers.eu](http://www.territorialthinkers.eu)

**Derek Martin:** “The free-thinking and enthusiasm of the Europe of the 1990s that led to the ESDP is no more. Europe has entered a new phase of self-reflection in which a number of quite fundamental dilemmas will have to be faced and answered, especially regarding the division of competences between the European institutions and the member states. ‘Territory’ is at the heart of many of those dilemmas. The territorial continuum of the Single Market clashes with the territorial fragmentation of a return to more national political control. The member states will have to decide: territorial cooperation or territorial competition. If they decide the first, indispensable if sustainable economic growth is to be maintained, then some sort of indicative European Territorial Reference Framework will be necessary. This will not be a revised ESDP but a totally new document, a forward-looking and strategic overview of territorial interdependencies. For times have indeed changed.”

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# THE ENTICEMENT OF THE ESDP: MOTIVATING (FUTURE) PLANNERS TO ENGAGE WITH EU POLICIES

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## Abstract

The impact of European policies strongly depends on their interpretation and application by domestic actors. This is especially true in fields such as European spatial planning and development, which are characterised by informal agreements and fragmented competences. Consequently, EU policies only gain importance if domestic actors consider them relevant and establish links to their respective areas of influence. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) is often regarded as a success story in European spatial planning and is relatively well known among planners across Europe. The Territorial Agenda documents, often considered successors to the ESDP, have not been met with the same enthusiasm and interest. This contribution uses the concept of storytelling to explain why the ESDP was at least partly successful in appealing to planners. Moreover, it discusses the role and importance of planning education in fostering interest in European spatial development.

### *Keywords*

*storytelling, planning education, European spatial planning, territorial cohesion, territorial agenda*

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## 1. Introduction

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), agreed upon by the Ministers of the member states of the European Union responsible for Spatial Planning in 1999, has received considerable attention among planning researchers (see Faludi and Waterhout, 2002; Davoudi, 2003; Faludi, 2004a). This is hardly surprising, given the fact that many still regard the ESDP as the climax of European spatial planning, perhaps even the only true instance of European spatial planning. Though they often did not receive the document quite as enthusiastically as their colleagues in academia, the ESDP also left a mark on practicing planners and non-academic stakeholders across Europe. It is regarded as relatively influential in planning circles (Nadin et al., 2018, p.79) and as a key milestone in the debate on the European dimensions of spatial planning (Dühr et al., 2010, p.212). Thus, at the time its 20-year anniversary was celebrated in 2019, the ESDP remained the best-known planning document at a European scale.

To put this into perspective, we must remind ourselves of the nature of European spatial planning and the connections between the EU and planning in the member states. The European Union has no competence for land use planning, yet it shares responsibilities for several policies with spatial implications with the member states, including regional and Cohesion Policy, transport policy and environmental policy. In these policy fields, the EU makes use of the opportunities to enact legally binding regulations and to support programmes and projects through financial instruments. Additionally, the ministers of the member states might agree upon strategic, non-binding policy documents, such as the ESDP, in policy fields for which the EU has no competence through intergovernmental negotiation processes. All types of policies rely on the principle of multi-level governance, dividing responsibilities for policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation among various levels of government, ranging from the EU to local authorities. This means that domestic actors at the national, regional and local levels can have a significant impact on the *de facto* outcomes of EU policies through their actions and practices. This is also true for the field of urban and regional planning, which remains dominated by policies that offer considerable leeway regarding their interpretation, implementation and instrumentalisation (Purkarthofer, 2018b). Consequently, the impact of European policies is shaped by domestic actors and requires active interest and engagement of planners and administrators to be effective. Planning is understood here in broad terms, encompassing all activities shaping spatial development ranging from land use planning to the coordination of the spatial impact of sector policies (Nadin, 2006). In turn, European spatial planning includes all activities at the EU level shaping spatial development, such as intergovernmental strategy development and supranational policy interventions, for instance in the fields of regional policy or transport policy.

This article investigates the ‘enticement’ of the ESDP, employing the theoretical lens of storytelling (Hajer, 1993, 1995; Throgmorton, 1996) and the conceptual framing of understanding Europeanisation from within (Purkarthofer, 2018b). To do so, it asks why the story of the ESDP resonates better with domestic planning actors’ concerns than other European strategy documents. Understanding the factors contributing to the appeal of the ESDP contributes to a better grasp of the challenges that European spatial planning is facing. The future of European dimensions of planning and spatial development will not only depend on the policies and strategies themselves, but also on their ability to foster interest in European matters and motivate (future) planners to engage with EU policies. To recognise and elaborate on this, this article raises the questions of what can be learned from the ESDP and how these findings can be incorporated into planning education.

## 2. ‘European Planning Stories’ and the Role of Domestic Actors in Their Interpretation, Implementation and Instrumentalisation

The importance of language in policy-making and problem formulation has been increasingly acknowledged in the field of planning since the publication of Fischer and Forester’s *Argumentative Turn* (Fischer and Forester, 1993b). This collection of theoretical and empirical contributions highlights how language and discourses constitute reality, frame politics and shape policies, affecting planning. Throgmorton famously described planning as ‘persuasive and constitutive storytelling’ (Throgmorton, 1993, 1996, 2003, p.126), claiming that planners create narratives, which, in order to appeal to different actors and stakeholders, allow for diverse interpretations and contextualisations. Storytelling is thus not a one-way process but depends on the actions of both authors and audiences.

While language is of general importance for the development and implementation of policies, it can be especially crucial in areas where no formal means of policy-making exist. As the EU lacks any formal competence in the field of spatial planning, discursive elements and storylines – sometimes combined with financial incentives – are thus used to promote European ideas regarding spatial development (Purkarthofer, 2018a). Various researchers have identified European discourses and studied their role in urban and regional planning, European integration and territorial governance (see e.g. Böhme, 2002; Dukes, 2008; Waterhout, 2008; Luukkonen, 2010; Servillo, 2010; Moisisio *et al.*, 2013). A significant number of contributions highlight the need to understand the ways in which European discourses are embedded into and reused in national, regional and local contexts (Shaw and Sykes, 2005; Cotella and Janin Rivolin, 2011; Moisisio and Luukkonen, 2015; Purkarthofer, 2018b).

However, storytelling must not only be understood as a linguistic process. Rather, there are many factors affecting whether stories appeal to politicians, administrators, stakeholders or the general public. Scholars have argued that images, maps and visualisations can be equally important in communicating planning in a persuasive way (Dühr, 2007; Rose *et al.*, 2014; Speake, 2017). In addition to the textual and visual content of planning documents and strategies, procedural considerations also frame storytelling. It is thus crucial *who* tells a story and *to whom* it is told, i.e. who represents the 'authors' and the 'audience' and how their relationships are shaped by power (Fischer and Forester, 1993a) and trust (Laine *et al.*, 2018). Moreover, the reception of stories is highly dependent on their timing and their place in a larger context (Forester, 1993), as the case of the ESDP shows.

As the degree of formality varies between different policies enacted at the European scale, most notably between legally binding regulations and voluntary intergovernmental strategies, domestic actors in the field of urban and regional planning are not always obliged to interact with EU policies. Consequently, a crucial factor which determines the impact of non-binding 'European planning stories' is whether they are successful in fostering interest and engagement among domestic actors. Depending on the actions of national, regional and local actors, European discourses can thus be used to shape, inform and support their arguments and planning decisions (Shaw and Sykes, 2005), or they can be subconsciously forgotten or consciously ignored. This leads to considerable variation in responses to European planning stories across Europe and within countries, which can only be fully understood from within, i.e. in specific local, regional and national contexts (Purkarthofer, 2018b). Nonetheless, some characteristics might support the appeal of certain stories and policies compared to others. The following section elaborates on the factors contributing to the enticement of the ESDP.

### 3. The Enticement of the ESDP: Language, Timing, Process and Links

The actual influence of the ESDP on planning and policy making in the member states remains contested. In 2006, a study by the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) – as it was then titled – researched the application and effects of the ESDP, concluding that direct impacts, i.e. formal and institutional changes triggered by the ESDP, had been limited (ESPON, 2006). However, the study argued that elements of the ESDP were present in national planning discourses and arguments were taken from the ESDP if they were regarded as useful, although often without direct reference to the ESDP. The application of the ESDP and its impacts are thus difficult to trace and measure, as they are usually indirect and implicit rather than direct and explicit (ESPON, 2006, p.5). Elsewhere, the impact of the ESDP has been described as variable, with its role ranging from functioning as a tool through which domestic policy ideas are uploaded to EU level, to it being a factor in reforming national planning systems (Dühr *et al.*, 2010, p.216).

This section aims to offer potential explanations as to why the ESDP was at least partly successful in creating interest among planners and administrators. Based on an analysis of the document itself, as well as the scientific literature on the ESDP, it identifies four factors contributing to the enticement of the ESDP: language and fuzziness, timing and focus, process and actors, and links with other policies. Clearly, these themes cannot be viewed as entirely separate from each other and overlaps and connections exist between them. They are now addressed in turn.

### 3.1. Language and Fuzziness

The ESDP consists of two parts: Part A introduces the policy framework of the ESDP and Part B provides background information and analyses. Across 82 pages, the ESDP thus presents a rather coherent overview of its role, policy objectives and application – as well as a discussion of EU policies with a spatial impact and the main concerns related to the European territory. While being coherent in its structure, the language used in the ESDP remains vague and leaves considerable room for interpretation. This is for example reflected in the three main policy guidelines for spatial development it presents (CEC, 1999, p.11):

- development of a balanced and polycentric urban system and a new urban-rural relationship
- securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge; and
- sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage.

All three policy guidelines allow for multiple interpretations, thus giving different actors the opportunity to interpret them in their own context and according to their own interests. Hajer (1995) introduces the concept of storyline to refer to an established narrative that suggests a common understanding between different actors, although their actual interpretations might differ. Hajer argues that storylines that ‘sound right’ hold the potential to be particularly successful and appealing to a wide audience. This is certainly the case for the policy guidelines presented in the ESDP, which represent widely accepted ideas that are easy to agree upon, especially when their exact meaning is not defined. The idea of storylines framing spatial development at the European scale was picked up some years after the ESDP was published (Waterhout, 2007; Purkarthofer, 2018a), resulting in the identification of five storylines related to territorial cohesion,<sup>1</sup> all of which originate from, or are already present in, the ESDP.

In the context of planning, multi-interpretability has become most apparent in relation to the concept of polycentricity (Peters, 2003; Dühr et al., 2010). In a much cited contribution, Davoudi (2003) demonstrated that the meaning of the term ‘polycentricity’ has remained elusive despite the increasing use of the concept in spatial policy. Polycentricity is not used as analytical concept but as policy principle, employed to serve two potentially conflicting goals at the same time – namely increasing the competitiveness of the EU in the world market and supporting a socially and spatially more cohesive Europe (Waterhout, 2002; Davoudi, 2003). Davoudi claims that the concept of polycentricity ‘provokes a “positive” image, yet one which can be shaped and re-shaped to serve any given purposes’ (Davoudi, 2003, p. 995). Similarly, Waterhout (2007, p. 41) argues that ‘the concept of polycentric development turned out to be a real winner and was picked up by many policy documents at the European as well as at the member state and subnational levels’. Yet, the use of polycentricity in (sub-)national planning contexts reveals potential discordance between different interpretations which may surface during planning processes (see e.g. Shaw and Sykes, 2004; Schmitt, 2013; Humer, 2018; Granqvist et al., 2019). Other concepts introduced in the ESDP similarly allow for multiple interpretations due to their loose definitions, for instance ‘global economic integration zones’ (Richardson and Jensen, 2003; Faludi, 2018) or ‘services of general interest’ (Colomb and Santinha, 2014; Humer, 2014).

The ESDP remains vague not only in its text but also its visual elements. Dühr et al. (2010) claim that statements made in the ESDP remain very general and that ‘the ESDP does not offer a vision of what the EU territory should look like’ (p. 214). Despite initial ambitions to visualise the policies of the ESDP, policy maps turned out to be too controversial during the process leading to the ESDP and were thus ultimately omitted. However, the ESDP contains icons illustrating each policy aim in a generic and highly abstract manner (Dühr, 2007). While some of the icons hint at a spatial aspect represented through an extremely simplified nose-shaped outline of Europe, other icons are simple pictograms with no spatial dimensions at all (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002).

However, despite the lack of ‘plans’ or policy maps, the ESDP can be regarded as using the language of planners; although during the making of the ESDP, it became apparent that it would take time for actors from across Europe to learn each other’s professional languages (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). The division of the ESDP into policy and analysis sections clearly resembles a common structure of many planning documents.

<sup>1</sup> The term ‘territorial cohesion’ increasingly replaced spatial planning and spatial development in the EU context (see e.g. Faludi, 2006).

In both parts, the document uses maps, graphs and charts to visualise information and breaks down text into short paragraphs, highlighting policy options related to each policy aim. These choices regarding style of language and visualisation, combined with the fuzziness of the key concepts and the resulting leeway for different interpretations, supported the appeal of the ESDP amongst domestic actors.

### 3.2. Timing and Focus

Another factor contributing to the appeal of the ESDP was the timing of its publication. The process leading to the publication of the ESDP in 1999 started approximately ten years previously (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002). During the 1990s, the perception of the ESDP was enhanced through developments relating to other sectoral policies at EU level, trends regarding spatial development across Europe, and the relative prominence of the ESDP compared to other processes.

During the 1990s, EU Regional and Cohesion Policy started to be increasingly associated with spatial planning and development. With the passing of the Single European Act in 1988, the Structural Funds gained importance and regional policy was often justified through the objectives of economic and social cohesion. Starting from 1988, EU Regional and Cohesion Policy made use of new funding programmes, including the Interreg community initiative, which is frequently regarded as a connecting element between regional policy and spatial planning (Dühr et al., 2007). The Single European Act also provided a basis for EU-wide environmental policy, leading to the enactment of the directives constituting the Natura 2000 ecological network in 1992. In 1997, the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, first introduced in 1985, was amended, and in 2001 it was complemented by the enactment of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Transport policy, unlike regional policy, had been identified as a shared EU competence already in the Treaty of Rome in the 1950s, yet EU member states did not develop joint European transport policies until the 1980s. Trans-European Transport Networks were devised and adopted in the 1990s, and financial support through EU funding mechanisms was ensured. Although these sectoral policies are not commonly understood as planning policies, they nonetheless had immediate effects for planners and administrators in the member states – thus ensuring the presence of EU policies in the daily working life of domestic actors.

The development of the ESDP also took place in a period of geopolitical transition for Europe. The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 resulted in a transformation of the political landscape in Europe, turning a formerly impermeable border between East and West into a relationship that had yet to be defined. The political upheaval had spatial implications, including the extension of the EU territory through the German reunification and the prospect of enlarging the EU to the East. Although negotiations regarding the EU accession were still ongoing when the ESDP was published, a chapter within the ESDP discusses the likely possibility of an enlargement that would significantly enhance the EU territory. This prospect clearly increased interest in spatial development at a European scale. In addition, the advance of economic integration and increased cooperation between member states – as well as the growing importance of local and regional communities and their role in spatial development – are mentioned as long-term spatial development trends underlying the development of the ESDP (CEC, 1999, p. 7).

Lastly, the timing of the ESDP was also fortunate with a view to competition between the ESDP and other documents and processes. Although information and communication technologies and the internet were gaining importance during the 1990s, the use of online tools and communication was less ubiquitous than today. Consequently, planners and administrators were confronted with fewer policy processes at the same time, resulting in a stronger focus of attention and resources on the ESDP.

### 3.3. Process and Actors

Another factor contributing to the appeal of the ESDP is the course of events leading to the publication of the document itself, which was by no means a straightforward process. Faludi and Waterhout (2002) describe with great insight the processes leading from the first ideas of a European planning document voiced in Nantes in 1989 to the presentation of the ESDP in Potsdam in 1999. There is no need to recount the events and different 'opportunity structures' coming into play here, as a short summary could not do justice to its complexities.

However, it needs to be emphasised that the process leading to the ESDP did not only produce a specific policy document, but also defined the rules for cooperation and negotiation regarding planning at the European scale. During these years, it was made customary to negotiate planning matters in informal ministerial meetings led by the 'trio' of EU presidencies (the current and immediate past and future member states holding the presidency). Although the presidencies thus shaped the agenda, adherence to the 'Corfu Method' ensured that all country delegations contributed to preparing the contents of the ESDP – thus strengthening the feeling of common ownership (Faludi and Waterhout, 2002, p. 72). The European Commission did not take a leading role in decision-making but supported the process by providing different types of resources, including interpreters, travel funding and meeting infrastructure. Despite different planning traditions and recurring disagreements regarding what the ESDP should or should not be, the feeling of common ownership prevailed in many of the countries involved and contributed to creating interest in the ESDP among domestic actors.

Moreover, an overlap between 'authors' and 'audience' was created by the fact that it was planners and administrators and not high-level politicians who drafted the texts ultimately comprising the ESDP. Faludi (1997) famously describes the professionals involved in the making of the ESDP as a 'roving band of planners', meeting in different locations across Europe and jointly defining their style of working. In addition to their role in shaping the planning discourse at the EU level, these actors worked in specific jobs in their home countries, which enabled them to ensure that the ESDP received attention in domestic planning contexts.

### 3.4. Links to Other Policies

The ESDP was also appealing due to its links with other policies, both at the EU and member state levels. In the ESDP, all of ten pages are dedicated to the application of the ESDP through horizontal and vertical cooperation. Especially European Territorial Cooperation programmes, such as Interreg and ESPON, were seen as important steps towards the application of the ESDP (Waterhout and Stead, 2007; Stead and Waterhout, 2008; Mirwaldt et al., 2009). However, other funding instruments within EU Regional and Cohesion Policy were also aligned with the policies presented in the ESDP. For instance, in the 2000-2006 structural funds period it was stipulated that programmes take note of the ESDP (Faludi, 2007, p.5). At the time, Kunzmann (1998, p.54 in Dühr et al., 2010) argued that these links between Community funding and the ESDP might save it from becoming a 'paper tiger'.

The links between the ESDP and planning policies at the national, regional and local level in the member states cannot be summarised concisely, as there is great variation between specific contexts. In many countries awareness of the ESDP is relatively high at the national level, intermediate at the regional level and low at the local level (ESPON, 2006, p. 21). Nonetheless, local, regional and national actors have the opportunity to establish connections between the ESDP and their respective spheres of policy-making. Different ways of applying the ESDP at the regional and metropolitan scale have for example been described in the context of the UK (Shaw and Sykes, 2003, 2005) and the cross-border North-West European Metropolitan Area (Faludi, 2001, 2004b). Purkarthofer (2018b) argues more generally that EU policies provide opportunities for instrumentalisation and support for the argumentation of domestic actors. The ways of instrumentalisation range from giving impetus to planning policies, self-promotion of cities and regions and justifying planning decisions, to challenging and renegotiating competences.

## 4. European Spatial Planning on the Verge of the 2020s: The Stories are Not Good, the Actors are Not Interested?

Although never renewed as initially planned, the ESDP did not mark the end of European spatial planning or discussions about spatial development at a European scale. However, a significant change in language occurred with the preparation of the Lisbon Treaty and the commitment to territorial cohesion as an objective therein. The term 'territorial cohesion' increasingly replaced spatial development in the EU context, despite the fact that there is no agreed upon definition or specified relationship with issues such as spatial planning. In light of these changes, the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (TAEU, 2007) and Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (TA2020, 2011) were agreed upon by the ministers responsible for spatial development. Although these documents can be regarded as successors to the ESDP, their appeal to and impact on the



planning community has been limited (Nadin et al., 2018, p.x). This section discusses the potential explanations of why the Territorial Agendas<sup>2</sup> (TAs) were not as successful in communicating their message and creating interest among domestic planning actors.

In addition to discourses related to spatial development and territorial cohesion, there have also been debates on urban policy taking place at the EU level. With the publication of the 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities' (German Presidency, 2007) occurring at the same time as the TAEU, urban and territorial issues are increasingly discussed jointly in the EU context (Faludi, 2009; Purkarthofer, 2018a). In 2016, the ministers responsible for urban matters agreed upon the Urban Agenda for the EU (EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters, 2016). Although a detailed analysis of the Urban Agenda goes beyond the scope of this article, it needs to be emphasised that the Urban Agenda addresses many subjects relevant to spatial planning. However, through the implementation mechanisms of partnerships, it focuses on procedural themes and leaves contents to be negotiated among experts in topic-specific partnerships (Purkarthofer, 2019). Nonetheless, as these partnerships also require commitment from domestic actors, the recommendations regarding planning education, presented in the final section of this article, are applicable to EU urban policies as well.

#### 4.1. Language and Fuzziness

There are fundamental differences in textual and visual language between the TAs and the ESDP, starting from the TAs' considerably shorter length of only eleven pages. There are no maps, graphs or pictures in the TAs; representing a conscious decision to avoid lengthy discussion about visualisations (Faludi, 2009). However, this means that the TAs, unlike the ESDP, did not attempt to conceptualise the shape of Europe or deliberate principles of spatial organisation. Thus, while the TAs continue to promote ideas such as polycentricity, these ideas are increasingly connected to a discourse on competitiveness rather than 'spatial planning', a term that is mentioned only once in the TAEU and five times in the TA2020, as opposed to nearly 50 times in the ESDP.

Interestingly, the initial idea behind the TAs was fairly different. As a consequence of the ESPON programmes, a plethora of EU-wide research on spatial issues was available in the early 2000s (Faludi, 2009). Thus, the aim of the TAs was to produce an evidence-based document. However, this idea receded into the background and the more elaborate document, entitled 'Territorial State and Perspectives of the EU' (Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, 2005), was separated from the TA strategies and received little attention or political support. In turn, the TAs themselves became rather 'political animals', addressing their audience clearly from the perspective of the ministers and omitting any direct references to ESPON findings (Faludi and Waterhout, 2005, p.331).

As a consequence, the TAs certainly show characteristics of multi-interpretability. This starts with the term 'territorial cohesion' itself, which is 'not the clearest of concepts, but one (like polycentrism) with considerable appeal' (Faludi and Waterhout, 2005, p.331). Since it was first invoked, territorial cohesion has been stretched to include a wide range of interpretations and related to a multitude of scales (Zonneveld and Waterhout, 2005). Relatedly, other vague concepts, such as 'territorial capital', initially seemed to replace the notion of polycentricity (Waterhout, 2007, p.49) but were in the end rarely picked up by planners<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, the dissemination of the TAs was undermined by the fact that no printed versions were released and that the TAs were not published in all official EU languages (Faludi, 2009). This meant that, despite being available on the internet in German, English and French, the reach of the TAs was unsurprisingly considerably lower, especially among regional and local actors. The increasing number of documents available online also potentially meant that 'information overload' diluted the impact of the TAs.

2 The Territorial Agenda of the EU (published in 2007) and the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (published in 2011) are very similar in their content, structure and style. Thus, they are discussed together as Territorial Agendas (TAs) if not stated otherwise.

3 However, the notion of territorial capital might provide a persuasive storyline from the viewpoint of regional development (Fratesi and Perucca, 2019).

Considering these observations regarding language, the 'conclusion must be that, where the ESDP may be considered to have been a planning document, albeit vague, the Territorial Agenda is nothing of the kind' (Faludi, 2009, p.27). As the TAs did not speak the language of planners, there was no clear target audience associated with the documents. This was supported by the fact that the objective of territorial cohesion was increasingly linked with growth and competitiveness instead of balanced spatial development. Both TA documents were accompanied by background documents (Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, 2005, 2011) which, in terms of language, scope, use of data and visual elements, bear some resemblance to the ESDP. However, these documents are more cautious in their language, referring to 'potential priorities' instead of 'policy aims' and were drafted by a considerably smaller number of actors from only a few countries. Consequently, these documents neither received political attention from European ministers or generated considerable attention among planners (Faludi, 2009, p. 26).

## 4.2. Timing and Focus

The enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 highlighted the need to rethink spatial development at a European scale. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, the EU has faced several setbacks, including the rejection of the constitution for Europe in several countries in 2005, the economic crisis starting in 2008 and the influx of migrants which peaked in 2015 and 2016. These events, combined with domestic issues, resulted in the rise of Euroscepticism across Europe and most famously in the UK's 'Brexit' vote in 2016. Concerns about spatial development and territorial cohesion were clearly sidelined in light of these events, although it can be argued that there is a spatial dimension to all of them (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2015; Johnston et al., 2018; Sykes, 2018).

Relating not so much to timing but rather attention and resources, one could also argue that a diversion of planners towards other EU policies occurred after the turn of the millennium. Planners were increasingly involved in the ESPON programmes, which in many ways aligned with the language, knowledge and self-perception of planners, and were thus regarded as the 'mainstay of European planning' (Faludi, 2015, p.284). While the collection of spatial data and information across Europe is desirable, one could argue that ESPON contributed to the detachment of planning from the political agenda at the EU level. Studies realised under the umbrella of ESPON are said to be analytical, neutral and 'evidence-based'. Political considerations, though often present, are not addressed, and the often lengthy ESPON reports do not undergo political negotiations comparable to those found in the forging of strategic policy documents such as the ESDP or TAs. Considering the detachment of the TAs into political strategies and evidence-based background documents, one might argue that planners and the data collected within ESPON have played a bigger role in the making of the latter rather than the former.

## 4.3. Process and Actors

After the publication of the ESDP, support for ministerial meetings on spatial planning from the European Commission vanished (Faludi and Waterhout, 2005). Nonetheless, in 2004 the Dutch presidency took the initiative and organised a meeting that can be regarded as the starting point of the process leading to the Territorial Agendas<sup>4</sup>. The event held in Rotterdam was well attended, and the atmosphere was perceived as positive and even enthusiastic (Faludi and Waterhout, 2005). Two years later, during the Finnish presidency, the first draft Territorial Agenda was presented – having been prepared by a small drafting group. Finally, in 2007 the Territorial Agenda was agreed during the German presidency. Although this process relied on the same informal institutional settings as the making of the ESDP, it was considerably shorter and involved fewer actors, fewer meetings and fewer phases of negotiation and deliberation.

Undoubtedly important from the perspective of spatial planning, the making of the TAs also involved fewer planners due to the fact that no member state had a minister responsible for territorial cohesion and because of the ties between the term and EU Cohesion Policy. Instead, the negotiations in many cases involved

4 The process leading to the Territorial Agendas is not as well documented as the making of the ESDP, partly due to the increasingly digital notes and comments which cannot be accessed in archives (Faludi, 2007).

representatives from ministries of economic affairs and finance. Planners – if they participated at all – often assumed subsidiary roles (Faludi, 2007, 2009). The TAEU stipulated its review and potential renewal during the Hungarian presidency in 2011. Thus, the development of the TA2020 was in many respects a pre-arranged task rather than a process of negotiation and deliberation comparable to the making of the ESDP.

#### **4.4. Links to Other Policies**

Finally, the TAs were not as successful in establishing links with other policies as the ESDP. There is, of course, a connection between the TAs and EU-level strategies, such as the Lisbon, Gothenburg and Europe 2020 strategies and the Treaty of Lisbon, which stipulates territorial cohesion as a central EU objective. However, connections with other sectoral policies remained weak or unspecified. Furthermore, the member states were asked to recognise the priorities set out in the TAs, but the TAs did not suggest any concrete means of implementation or application (Faludi, 2009). Thus, despite addressing relevant topics, the application or implementation of the TAs has been rather weak in the member states (Nadin et al., 2018).

This is not to say that the objective of territorial cohesion or the spatial dimension of EU policies remains generally ignored. Since the publication of the Barca report (Barca, 2009), the need for EU policies to become increasingly place-based has been widely acknowledged. The introduction of new (or redefined) funding instruments within EU Cohesion Policy, namely Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), represent a clear attempt to establish stronger links between EU policies and regional and local contexts, while also acknowledging the need for flexibility voiced by domestic actors. The earmarking of funding towards Sustainable Urban Development in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) regulation is another effort to strengthen these connections. However, these 'Territorial Delivery Mechanisms' envisage complementarity among each other (Servillo, 2017) instead of emphasising connections to the TAs.

### **5. A View to Planning Education: Motivating (Future) Planners to Engage with EU Policies**

The previous two sections have contrasted the ESDP and the TAs from the perspective of persuasive storytelling, highlighting why the ESDP created more traction among domestic planning actors than the TAs. Ultimately, however, the aim of this article is not to give an historic account of the documents relating to European spatial planning but to derive future-oriented findings from understanding the enticement of the ESDP. The relevant questions are thus how to foster interest in European spatial development and how to motivate (future) planners to engage with the EU. Clearly, planning education plays a key role in shaping planners' attitudes towards the EU and spatial policies at a European scale.

The Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) has defined a core curriculum and established a procedure for quality recognition for planning programmes (Lo Piccolo, 2017) – an important contribution towards enhancing planning education in Europe. Nonetheless, we observe a lot of variation regarding how EU policies and the European scale are addressed in planning education. While in some cases there are whole master's programmes focused on European spatial planning, in other programmes European processes are handled in one course, or even one lecture. Planning programmes within design-oriented planning schools might omit references to European policies and processes altogether.

The argument here is not that planning education should prioritise teaching European spatial development and territorial cohesion above all other subjects. This would be neither justified nor feasible. However, there is a need to convey to future planners that they are the ones who need to engage with EU policies. Since there will often be no obligation to do so, planning education needs to increase awareness of the active role planners need to take on when engaging with EU policies (Purkarthofer, 2018b). As Faludi and Waterhout (2002) stated in 2002, the Europeanisation of planning will require new skills not only from the international planners who want to shape policy at the EU scale, but also from ordinary professionals.

One might counter that the downturn European spatial development and territorial cohesion is currently facing does not justify the claim that greater emphasis on these issues is necessary in planning education. However, if we succeed in educating future planners in a way that avoids associations between complexity and EU policies, and highlights the potential connections between different policies and the opportunities for planning instead, European spatial planning might be resurrected in the years to come. In light of transboundary challenges such as climate change, sustainable food production and international labour markets, the European perspective is as important as ever. European spatial planning could play a key role in integrating policies at different spatial scales and ensuring coordination between different sectoral policies. It is the task of planning education now to ensure that future planners are aware of these opportunities and their own crucial role in seizing them. If planning educators are successful in fostering interest in European spatial development, the Europe of the 2020s might see a successor to the ESDP and the TAs to which planners across Europe can actually relate.

Faludi claimed ten years ago that the European planning community is in the process of renewing itself, potentially at the expense of losing its pioneering spirit and collective memory (2009). Observing the modest developments regarding European spatial planning during recent years, he might have been right when fearing the loss of interest, knowledge and capacity. However, it is not too late for planning education to find ways to motivate future planners to engage with EU policies. We need to empower them to act jointly at a European scale to develop narratives for strategic planning and spatial development, and to act within their local, metropolitan, regional or national organisations to establish connections between European planning stories and their respective area of influence.

## 6. Conclusion

Twenty years after its publication, the aims and policy options presented in the ESDP still inspire planning activities in various countries (Nadin et al., 2018, p.48). This article uses the concept of storytelling to explain the relative success of the ESDP in the planning community compared to subsequent documents such as the Territorial Agendas. Storytelling in this context should not be understood as an attempt to lull or manipulate actors but rather as a means to create interest in European spatial policies and communicate their *raison d'être*. To do so, European policies need to resonate with the concerns of domestic actors and need to be communicated in a way that is meaningful and useful for them.

This article argues that the ESDP was more successful in creating interest among domestic actors because it contained several attractive storylines which held the potential to be interpreted in multiple ways. Domestic actors have thus used these storylines as arguments to support their own planning objectives. Links with other policies, especially EU funding instruments, further sustained engagement with the ESDP among planners in the member states. Moreover, the long development process leading to the ESDP, which involved a multitude of actors from each member state, and its publication in a time of growing opportunities relating to European spatial policies supported its success.

Subsequent documents, specifically the TAEU and TA2020, are generally less known and have hardly produced any impacts from the viewpoint of planning (Nadin et al., 2018, p.48). This article argues that the lack of interest in these documents can in part be explained by the absence of persuasive storytelling. Similarly, a recent ESPON study claims that the ESDP has left a stronger mark on spatial planning because it was more concrete and at the same time more visionary than the TAs (Nadin et al., 2018, p.86). The TAs do not speak the 'language of planners', and thus planners do not seem to be the primary target audience. The brevity of the TA documents also impedes the establishment of connections with other policies and funding instruments. Moreover, debates related to spatial planning and territorial cohesion currently seem to lack momentum at a European scale, and are frequently sidelined by external and centrifugal forces (Dąbrowski and Lingua, 2018). As a result, the future of European spatial planning and integration remains uncertain (Cotella et al., 2020). At the time of writing this article, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is being prepared and it remains to be seen which stories are told in this policy document and whether they will be appealing to planners.

No matter how the Territorial Agenda 2030 turns out, ultimately planning education will be a key factor in strengthening the connection between debates at the European level and the daily work of planners and public servants in the member states. If the mechanisms of policy-making at the EU level are meaningfully explained and interest in European issues is sparked, (future) planners could be more eager to engage with the EU level. In addition to creating links between EU policies and domestic issues, this could, in the long run, lead to a resurgence of European spatial planning as a meaningful forum to discuss large-scale concerns in Europe.

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# EXPLORING THE FUNCTIONAL AREA APPROACH IN EU URBAN STRATEGIES

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## Abstract

A vast literature has investigated processes of spatial reconfiguration, contributing to the emergence of a 'new urban question' that not only reframes traditional urban issues but also challenges our understanding of what cities are today. Be that as it may, the 'European city model' still remains current, particularly with regards to the institutional role of cities as they are increasingly considered to be relevant policy actors. This urban paradox gives new emphasis to the urban regional scale and urgently calls for the two dimensions to be connected both in terms of territorial dynamics and policy formulation. This paper addresses the topic by focusing on the functional area approach promoted by the European Union regional policy discourse, and by discussing how it shapes and legitimates new spatial configurations, with implications for urban analysis and policy approaches. The paper is based on the analysis of a database which gathers nearly 1000 strategies for Sustainable Urban Development funded by the EU between 2014-2020, and features a significant number of functional areas. The analysis reveals that the functional area approach does not only apply to metropolitan areas, big cities, or Functional Urban Areas, but can also be used for different types of territories, beyond metropolitan areas. It also underscores the need for more extensive research on what spatialities and territorial arrangements emerge from this process.

### *Keywords*

*EU urban policy, sustainable urban development, FUAs, strategic planning*

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# 1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, European urban discourse has been characterised by the upsurge of urban regionalisation. The focus has shifted from urban (inner) areas to city regions and functional areas (Davoudi, 2008). These concepts are useful to describe emerging spatial configurations, where the boundaries between urban and rural, and urban and suburban blur (Soja, 2011, 2017). City regions and functional areas are not characterised by specific spatial forms, but conversely by functional relations and spatial interactions. According to the literature, functional regions and functional areas are primarily determined by economic interactions, and secondarily by social cultural and environmental flows (Drobne, 2017). The importance of functional regions and areas is not purely analytical and they are increasingly seen as relevant for policy implementation (Davoudi, 2008; Morgan, 2014).

This paper explores the concept of Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) at a pan European level because they are considered as relevant spatial units to tackle emerging urban challenges. More importantly, the aim of the paper is to disentangle the role of the European Union (EU) in promoting FUAs as key strategic spaces for sustainable urban development.

The paper is organised as follows. Firstly, it clarifies the concept of FUA, its usage from statistical and analytical viewpoints, and its potential as a policy construct. Secondly, it looks into the policy discourse established by the European Commission on FUAs, in particular within the urban dimension of the EU's Cohesion Policy. Finally, it analyses the concrete uptake of that approach at national and local levels.

The analysis is the outcome of a research project called URBADDEV "Support knowledge management of EU measures in Integrated Urban and Territorial development" run in 2017-2019 by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and entrusted to DG for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) of the European Commission. The project had the following objectives:

- To build a knowledge base on the concrete implementation of the EU integrated approach to urban and territorial development under Cohesion Policy 2014-2020
- To develop methodological guidance to support the current and future implementation of strategies of Sustainable Urban Development (SUD)<sup>1</sup>.

The project resulted in two outputs. The first output is an interactive webtool called STRAT-Board<sup>2</sup>, which provides a visual overview of urban and territorial development strategies supported by EU Cohesion Policy in 2014-2020.<sup>3</sup> The second output is the Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies<sup>4</sup> (Fioretti et al., 2020), which supports policy-makers and practitioners in tackling the most critical and recurrent issues in the process of designing and implementing strategies during the current and future programming period.

The paper is based on the mixed methodology of the URBADDEV project. This methodology entails a review of academic literature and grey literature on urban regionalisation and on the urban dimension of EU policy, as well as quantitative analysis of the STRAT-Board database, and qualitative analysis.

The quantitative analysis of the STRAT-Board database offers a unique pan-European understanding of the integrated approach to SUD as supported by Cohesion Policy, through data on more than 900 strategies implemented between 2014-2020 in 28 countries. The data was collected as follows. First, the STRAT-Board

1 Sustainable Urban Development as defined in Article 7 of Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Regional Development Fund and on specific provisions concerning the Investment for growth and jobs goal and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006.

2 <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/>

3 It includes strategies of Sustainable Urban Development (SUD), Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) and Community-led Local Development (CLLD).

4 <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies>

knowledge base was built upon the DG REGIO study Integrated Territorial and Urban Strategies; -how are ESIF adding value in 2014-2020? (Van der Zwet et al., 2017). Then, between February and December 2018 JRC ran a survey of 119 Managing Authorities responsible for SUD, which included around 35 structured questions,<sup>5</sup> in order to update, complement, and verify the available data.

The survey contained two key pieces of information by which to specifically analyse strategies in FUAs. The first concerned the territorial focus of the strategies: neighbourhoods, cities, networks of cities or FUAs. The second was the territorial coverage of the strategies as regards the definition of the location and perimeter of each strategy according to territorial units used for statistics (NUTS classification). Territorial focus and territorial coverage were cross-analysed against other attributes such as the size of the targeted population, thematic focus, funding arrangements, and governance structure.

Additionally, qualitative analysis was carried out through a defined number of case studies. In particular, cases were selected to guarantee a wide geographical coverage, and encompass a variety of strategy typologies and policy actors<sup>6</sup>. Cases were analysed with respect to methodological challenges tackled by policy-makers during the design and implementation stages of strategies. Case studies were built using secondary and primary sources such as literature reviews, and interviews and workshops with policy-makers, experts, and relevant stakeholders (the Urban Development Network peer-review workshops and two URBADDEV workshops).

## 2. Emerging Spatial Forms: Main Narratives

A vast literature has investigated processes of spatial reconfiguration affecting urban areas in the past 30 years (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Soureli and Youn, 2009; Brenner, 2014; Soja, 2017). Due to the model of the nineteenth century, as described by the Chicago School, having become outdated, scholars have looked for narratives and terms able to describe the new spatial forms that urbanisation has assumed: global cities, (global) city-regions, mega cities, mega city-regions, polycentric regions, functional urban regions, regional urbanisation (Sassen, 2001; Scott, 2001; Hall and Pain, 2006; Cheshire and Hay, 1989; Soja, 2011). More specifically, starting from the 1990s the concept of city-regions has gained prominence in the economic geography debate (Rodríguez-Pose, 2008), supported by seminal studies on the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation (Scott, 2001; Harvey, 2001), and the rise of a globalised network society (Castells, 1996; Sassen, 2001).

Relevant to the aim of this paper is that, in spite of the fact that a commonly accepted definition is missing, city-regions focus on the economic and social articulation of relatively large cities or systems of medium-sized cities in close geographical proximity, with their suburban, peri-urban, and rural hinterlands. This implies that first, the boundaries of a city-region do not necessarily correspond to the administrative boundaries of a city, and second, that the concept of a city-region marks a departure from the morphological definition of the urban physical structure by focusing on relational dynamics (Robson et al., 2006), mainly defined as economic interactions (Drobne, 2017).

In spite of these novelties, some authors underline an enduring urban-centric view of city-region, with more emphasis on the relationship between the city and the region rather than on the city-region itself (Gonzales et al., 2006; Davoudi, 2008; Coombes, 2014). Soja (2011) recognises this, noting that a sort of inertia has prevented contemporary urban scholars from going beyond a traditional division between (dense) urban and (low-density) suburban. In Soja's opinion the contemporary urban form is characterised by an erosion of the boundary between urban and suburban, with a convergence in the density levels, and the upsurge of an 'expansive, polynucleated, densely networked, information-intensive, and increasingly globalized city region' (Soja, 2011, p.7). This process of regional urbanisation is characterised by:

5 A second survey to update the data has been launched in November 2020.

6 For the entire URBADDEV project 25 cases were analysed.

- the mixing between forms of urban and suburban;
- processes of decentralisation and recentralisation, leading to the emergence of new unstable “inner cities”, with the expulsion of some urban functions towards a peri-urban context capable of generating new centres;
- increasingly dense and demographically as well as economically differentiated suburbs, presenting new and heterogeneous ways of life, more like those previously typical of urban centres, and growing conflicts generated by processes of exclusion of some social segments and attraction of desired populations and activities.

Regional urbanisation can be seen as a powerful narrative which spans beyond spatial disciplines such as planning or urban studies. Morgan (2014) warns of the risks of adopting a narrow frame for this narrative, and of seeing city-regions purely as vehicles for economic growth. Instead, it is suggested that a broader perspective on regional urbanisation would lead to addressing city-regions as strategic planning spaces. This would require a deep revision of the city-region concept to take into account issues of governance, social equity, and sustainability (Ward and Jonas, 2004; Harding, 2007; Harrison, 2007; Beel et al., 2016; Axinte et al., 2019). From a spatial point of view, this would also require defining appropriate methods and categories to spatially represent and map ongoing processes of regional urbanisation, focusing no longer on cities as static entities with clear and detectable borders, but rather on functional urban regions. In fact, ‘when the regional dimension is not taken into consideration, problems, conflicts and processes cannot be recognised as they should be to understand and include them in a new public agenda’ (Balducci et al., 2017, p.309).

## 2.1. Mapping Functional Urban Areas in the European Union

In order to map ongoing processes of regional urbanisation, many efforts have been made over decades to identify urban regions according to functional relations instead of administrative or morphological criteria. Functional relations are usually defined in terms of economic interactions, e.g. labour markets (Berry, 1968; Coombes et al., 1982; Cheshire and Hay, 1989; Veneri, 2013), but attempts to include other types of flows, such as journeys to services, have also been acknowledged (Coombes and Wymer, 2001).

As a consequence of the upsurge of new urban forms, the need to find new statistical definitions of what can be considered ‘a city’, as well as new ways of classifying urban areas, also emerged at EU level. In 2018, Eurostat adopted a legislative initiative called ‘Tercet’ which aimed to integrate the classification of territorial units for statistics based on population thresholds known as NUTS (Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003) with a classification based on territorial typologies which better qualify the nature of territorial areas.

Specifically, at local level the definition of a city (Dijkstra and Poelman, 2012) is based on the method developed by the EC and OECD and called Degree of Urbanisation (DEGURBA). This method is computed using maps of built-up areas and population density obtained from satellite images and national censuses. It introduced the typology of Functional Urban Area (FUA) which identifies densely populated urban areas (cities) and adjacent municipalities with high levels (at least 15% of the employed population) of commuting towards the densely populated centres (commuting zones) (Figure 1). This classification has been applied across the European Union to map FUAs and to develop comparative analysis (Kompil et al., 2015). In addition, the Urban Data Platform managed by the Joint Research Centre allows the exploration of different sets of data aggregated at the FUA scale<sup>7</sup>.

If NUTS classification primarily mirrors the administrative structure of the Member States, then the territorial typologies introduced with the Tercet regulation are purely based on density and on a functional understanding of cities, allowing for individuating urban areas across administrative boundaries.

7 <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

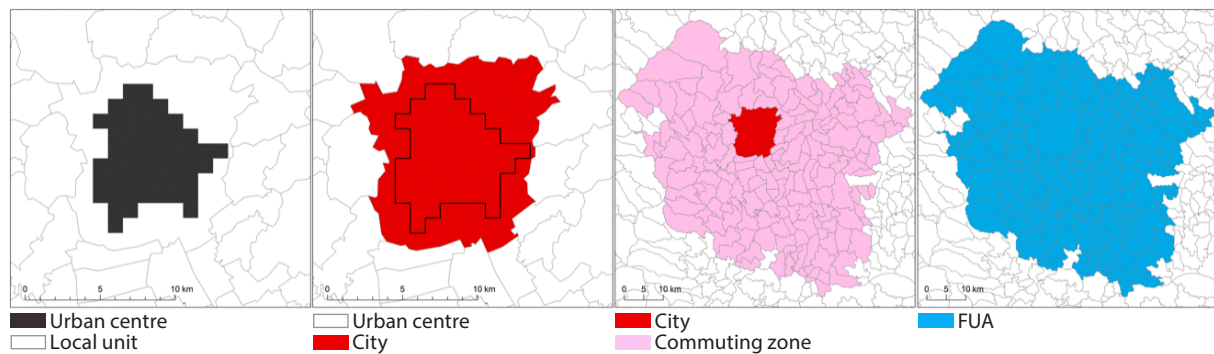


Figure 1 - From left to right: Urban centre, city, commuting zone and FUA.

Source: JRC, DG REGIO

<https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ucdb2018Overview.php>

The OECD/EU methodology used to define FUA (Dijkstra et al., 2019) is not exempt from the same critique that has been made of the concept of city-regions (Davoudi, 2008), being still city-centric and economically driven. However, it marks a significant move to embrace the new scale of contemporary urban processes. The importance of FUAs can be illustrated by the size of the ‘spatial mismatch’: a substantially larger number of people live in the FUAs of European cities than in the core of cities (European Commission and UN-HABITAT, 2016, Lavalley et al., 2017). In the case of Milan, the Urban Centre, which corresponds to the municipality of Milan, has 1,242,123 inhabitants (2011 national census), whereas the City has 3,139,394 inhabitants and the FUA counts 4,138,424 inhabitants. This means that the population living outside the municipal boundaries of Milan but still within the FUA, is 133 percent larger than that living in the core urban area.

In the case of many urban areas across the EU, SUD would need to be coordinated across the whole functional area, although, in many cases cooperation between municipalities is weak or non-existent (Tosics, 2014). This is why the concept of FUA, beyond its statistical significance, also started entering EU policy discourses.

## 2.2. Functional Areas to Govern the New Urban Question

Regional urbanisation as a narrative for SUD requires a critical interpretation of the generative force of regional development and recognition of the negative externalities of urbanisation processes. In fact, higher population densities in city regions mean more strain on public services, a worsening of environmental and health conditions, and increasing social polarisation as well as spatial inequalities. All those externalities together cannot be seen as a simple extension of the metropolitan model, but must be reframed as a new urban question.

Historically, radical changes in the structure of economy and society have led to the emergence of new urban questions, and this can also be said for the current growing urbanisation and spatial redistribution of the world's population. According to Secchi (2010) the challenges that we presently face entail issues of climate change, mobility rights, and increasing economic, cultural and spatial polarisation. In relation to all these aspects, Secchi underlines the role of space and of spatial relations, and he also emphasises the relevance of spatial capital next to economic, social, and institutional variables. In other words, each urban question needs the appropriate territorial base, large enough to deal with the above-mentioned externalities. FUAs seem to represent the relevant scale to intervene at with an integrated policy approach to face the new urban questions (Tosics, 2014).

Drawing on the Italian tradition of territorial political economy, Le Galès (2018) argues that contemporary urbanisation processes can be explained only in relation to social and political transformation. He argues that although we are witnessing some dramatic changes in the nature of cities we should not generalise trends at global level, nor identify macro-economic forces as the only factors at risk. In fact, and with specific reference to European cities, when looking at the impact of a major economic phenomenon such as the large-scale economic crises of 2008, EU metro-regions<sup>8</sup> appear to be in a favourable position. Compared to states, they

8 Metro-regions as applied to the European context, including also medium-sized cities and their hinterlands.



seem well placed to face current challenges because, through urban policies, they can tackle social problems, face issues of sustainable development and climate change, and also foster national economic growth.

In his analysis of European cities in the 1990s, Le Galès (2002) demonstrated how the political dimension was paramount to the prosperity of middle-sized metropolises. Urban development strategies were collective projects where urban elites sustained the representation of cities themselves as major actors. Furthermore, those transformative projects were also supported by the unifying role played by the EU. If the current spatial pattern of European urban areas is changing under the pressure of regionalising trends, then we need to assess the capacity to govern new urban configurations. This raises questions such as what form should strategic planning take today, and what role might the European Union play therein?

### 3. New Spatialities in the EU Urban Discourse

Traditionally two separate discourses have been developed within EU policy frameworks and regulations (Atkinson, 2001). One is the urban policy discourse which, since the early Urban Communications of the 1990s, focused on reversing the internal decay of cities and specifically on the issue of deprived neighbourhoods. The other is the spatial or territorial policy discourse which was developed through the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) during the same years. The latter had its roots in traditional regional development policy and aimed to achieve a balanced and polycentric development of European urban areas within a framework of competition and cooperation (Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, 1999).

The urban discourse was more centred on social cohesion and had as its main operational counterparts area-based initiatives (e.g. the URBAN Community Initiative) which were intended to be integrated responses to the decline of districts within cities. This approach, the so-called integrated, holistic, and participative one, has characterised the EU approach to urban policy, and is otherwise known as the *Acquis Urbain* (European Commission, 2009).

Meanwhile, the ESDP assigned priority to market processes and set the basis for a spatial agenda. Its basic goals were economic and social cohesion, sustainable development, and balanced competitiveness of the European territory (Atkinson, 2001). The ESDP also emphasised the need for a new relationship between urban and rural areas.

In the first decade of this century these two separate discourses started to converge, especially in the informal Meeting of Ministers of 2007 responsible for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion which was held in Leipzig, Germany. Two important documents were approved during this meeting. The first was the Leipzig Charter, setting common principles and strategies for urban development policy throughout the European Union (Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Policy, 2007). The second was the Territorial Agenda, which sought to provide strategic orientations for a polycentric and balanced territorial development in the European Union (Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion, 2007). According to González Medina and Fedeli (2015), the launch of the two agendas side by side demonstrated a growing link between the urban and the territorial dimension of EU policies in the framework of the Cohesion Policy. It was in fact in these same years that the EU supported urban actions were mainstreamed in the EU regional policy and ceased to be separate Community Initiatives, but rather started to be part of the Operational Programmes funded through the European Investment and Structural Funds (ESIF). As a result, in 2012, DG REGIO changed its name and became explicitly the Directorate General of the European Commission for both Regional and Urban Policy. This happened in line with the Toledo Declaration of 2010 (Informal Meeting of Ministers of Housing and Urban Development, 2010) which stated that urban development should be an integral part of the concept of territorial cohesion (González Medina and Fedeli, 2015).

The converging of these two perspectives influenced the understanding of the urban dimensions of EU policy, and growing attention was paid to the spatial and territorial development of EU cities and city-regions. The EU urban discourse shifted from focusing only on the regeneration of neighbourhoods, to embracing more

broadly the objective of sustainable urban development. Deprived neighbourhoods were included into wider territorial frameworks and strategies were encouraged to cross administrative borders.

The discourse on functional areas subsequently started permeating programmatic documents. The Territorial Agenda 2020 (Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, 2011, p.6) states that

the cooperation and networking of cities could contribute to smart development of city regions at varying scales in the long run. *Cities should, where appropriate look beyond their administrative borders and focus on functional regions, including their peri-urban neighbourhoods* (added emphasis).

At the same time, the Urban Agenda for the EU (Informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters, 2016, p.4):

acknowledges the polycentric structure of Europe and the diversity (social, economic, territorial, cultural and historical) of Urban Areas across the EU. (...)

*A growing number of urban challenges are of a local nature, but require a wider territorial solution (including urban-rural linkages) and cooperation within FUAs. At the same time, urban solutions have the potential to lead to wider territorial benefits. Urban Authorities therefore need to cooperate within their functional areas and with their surrounding regions, connecting and reinforcing territorial and urban policies* (added emphases).

Moreover, the new versions of the Leipzig Charter and of the Territorial Agenda, both launched in 2020, cross-reference each other and stress the importance of cooperation between and across spatial levels (Territorial Agenda 2030, Draft version, July 2020, p.15):

*Cooperation and networking within and between cities, towns and their surrounding areas in the same functional region create development perspectives for all places. Such functional regions often break with existing administrative delineations, differ according to functional character and interconnection, are highly dynamic and can shift over time. Decision-makers in cities and towns looking beyond their administrative borders at functional regions and cooperating with their surrounding areas can help their places serve as motors for intra-regional growth* (added emphases).

Themes with spatial connotations that were previously discussed strictly in the territorial discourse, have also entered the urban one. This implies acknowledgement of the emergence of new spatialities in the EU, of the erosion of the line between urban and rural, and of the growth of urban areas across administrative boundaries as defined by density and functional relations.

From an operational point of view, this turn was reflected in the 2014-2020 framework for urban policy. During this programming period, the mainstreaming of urban policy within EU regional policy was further consolidated and investment in urban areas through integrated strategies for SUD became compulsory (5% of European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) earmarked for SUD in each Member State). Additionally, special emphasis was placed on the importance of urban-rural linkages, on the functional area approach, whilst new tools such as integrated territorial investment (ITI) to implement strategies on the level of FUAs were promoted.

This correspondence between political orientation and policy praxis stresses even more the FUA concept, which is not only seen as a spatial category, but has also become a strategic one. In fact, in the 2014-2020 framework, urban areas targeted by SUD are not defined by administrative boundaries, but by strategies themselves (Balducci, 2014). Paraphrasing Morgan (2014), the EU emphasis on FUAs seems to legitimate these new spatial configurations as strategic planning spaces to address SUD.

How this new opportunity has been received by Member States remains to be explored. Particularly, the analysis of SUD strategies addressing functional areas will help to disentangle the implications of this approach in terms of policymaking.

#### 4. Analysis of SUD Strategies Addressing Functional Areas in 2014-2020

This section presents an analysis of the SUD strategies addressing functional areas supported by Cohesion Policy during the 2014-2020 programming period. The STRAT-Board database provides an overview of the territorial focus<sup>9</sup> of 849 SUD strategies.

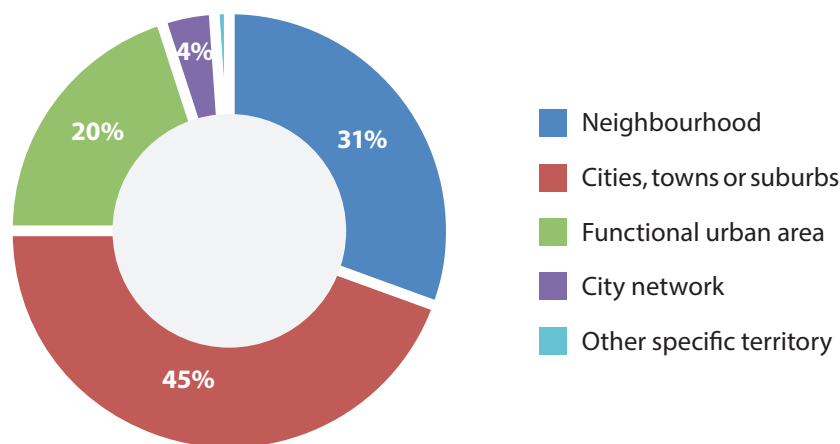


Figure 2 - Distribution of strategies per territorial focus (n = 849)

Figure 2 shows that the majority of SUD strategies focus on cities (45%), followed by neighbourhoods (31%), FUAs or metropolitan areas (20%), a network of cities (4%), and a portion of territory with specific features such as a park, an archaeological zone, or an island (0.4%). This means that even if cities and neighbourhoods represent the most common territorial foci, attention to spatialities across administrative boundaries can also be witnessed at the same time, implying the adoption of a functional area approach for SUD strategies. It follows, that the functional area approach identifies a space – different from an administrative entity – in which a specific territorial interdependence (or function) occurs which may need to be governed in its entirety. Adopting this broad definition of a functional area, the latter three categories of territorial focus<sup>10</sup>, although smaller in respect to the other two, become relevant.

Figure 3 displays the territorial focus per Member State. It shows that the functional area approach can be found throughout all macro-regions, with the exception of a few countries. However, some differentiations emerge when looking in more detail. In some countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia, strategies focus exclusively on FUAs. In other countries including Austria, Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Sweden and the UK, the focus on FUAs is relevant but not exclusive, and coexists with other territorial foci.

9 The territorial focus refers to the specific area the strategy focuses on. Here, five different types of territorial focus are considered. 1) Neighbourhood: indicating that the strategy focuses single or multiple district/neighbourhood of a single or multiple cities or towns. 2) Cities, towns or suburbs: indicating that the strategy addresses the entire administrative unit of a city, town, village, suburb. 3) FUA: indicating that the strategy addresses multiple cities/towns, including FUAs and metropolitan areas. 4) City network: indicating that the strategy targets multiple cities/towns, not necessarily geographically or functionally connected, on the basis of cooperation purposes. 5) Other specific territory: indicating that the strategy focuses on a portion of territory identified on the basis of its specific features (e.g. coastal area, natural park, economic development zone, etc.).

10 For most analyses that follow, the three latter categories of territorial focus are merged into one called "functional area (multiple municipalities)".

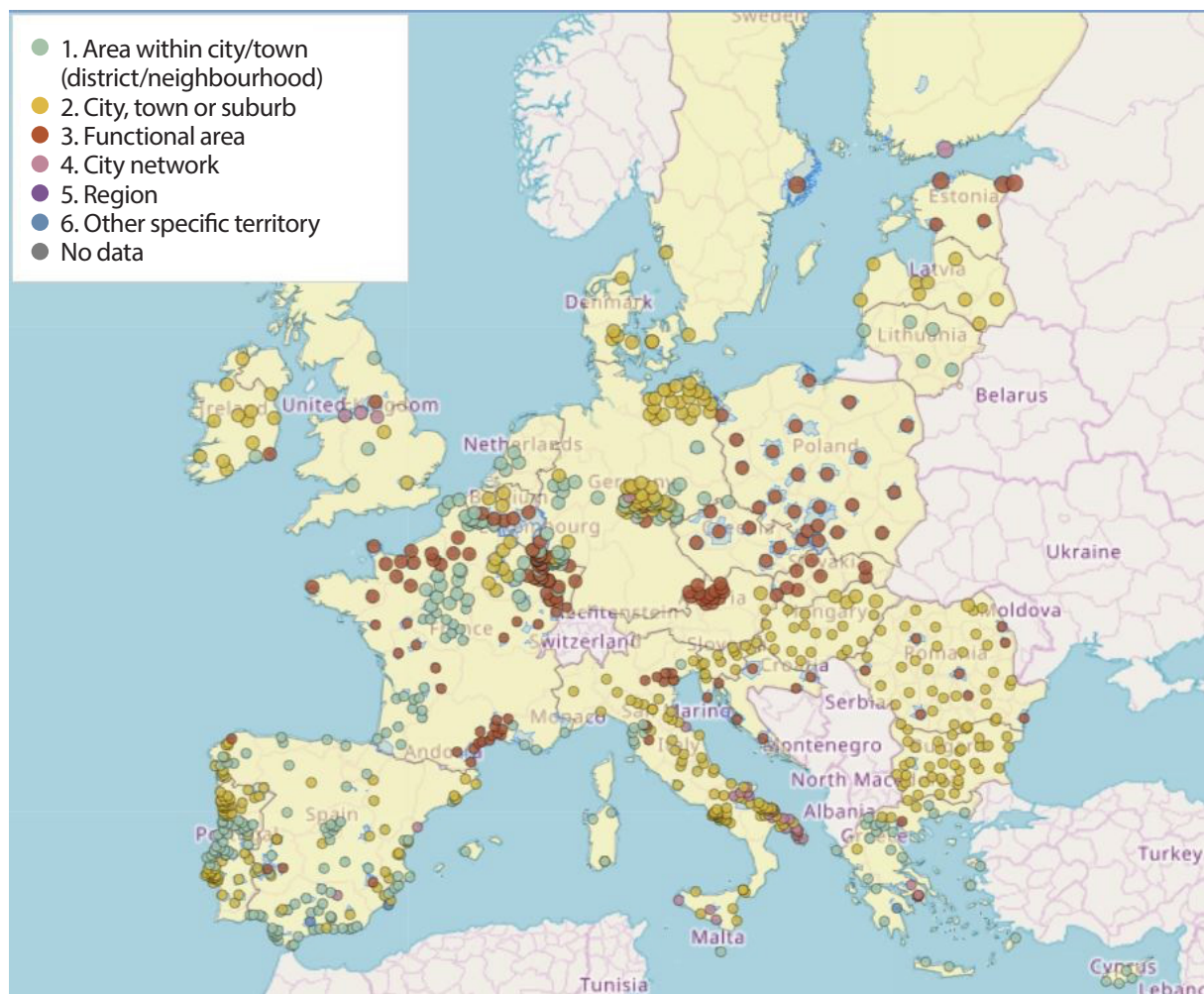


Figure 3 - Map of SUD strategies in Europe per territorial focus.  
Source: STRAT-Board

The importance of the functional area approach becomes evident when looking at funding. Overall, the largest share of ESIF funding is invested into FUAs; they absorb 51.1 percent of the total funding (corresponding to 8.3 billion EUR). Cities are the second highest category and account for 35.2 percent of ESIF investment (5.6 billion EUR), while neighbourhoods receive 13.3 percent of it (2.1 billion EUR).

As Figure 4 shows, the majority of the investment in functional areas is in less developed regions, as defined by ERDF categorisation<sup>11</sup>, where the share of EU funding is the highest (70%). This is interesting because it shows that this type of territorial focus - although applied to a lower number of strategies - is the one which receives most ESIF.

<sup>11</sup> The European Commission groups NUTS 2 regions into three categories depending on their share of GDP per capita in respect to EU-27 average: less developed (GDP/head < 75% of EU-27 average), transition (GDP/head between 75% and 90% of EU-27 average) and more developed (GDP/head >= 90% of EU-27 average). ERDF allocation depends on the category of region.

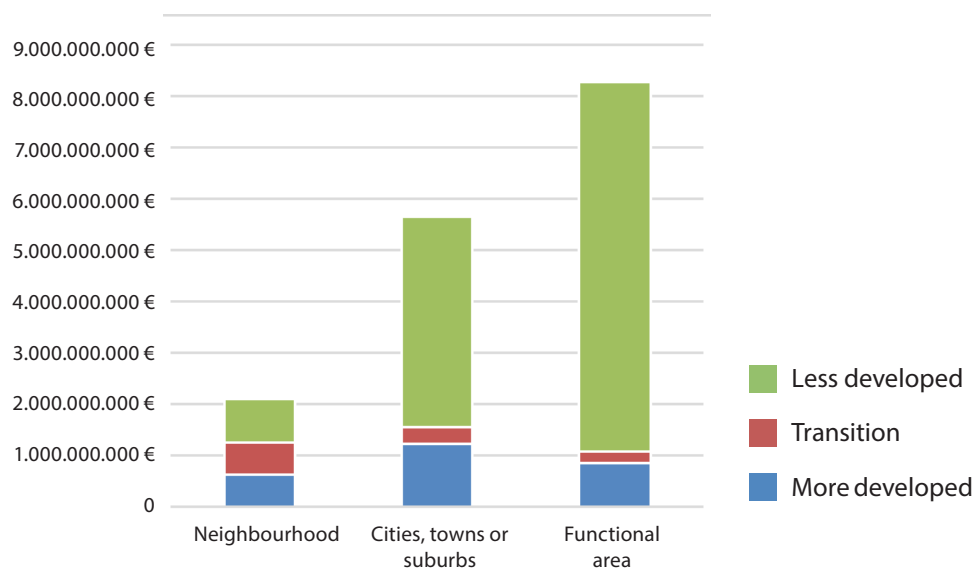


Figure 4 - Distribution of ESIF funding per territorial focus and type of region

In fact, strategies with the largest ESIF budgets (more than 100 million EUR) targeting functional areas are exclusively located in less developed regions of EU13 countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia). On the other hand, in EU15 countries there are quite a relevant number of strategies addressing functional areas with small ESIF budgets (Figure 5). For example, in France, 50 percent of the strategies with an ESIF budget of less than 5 Million EUR address a functional area, while in Italy the figure is 33 percent.

It can be additionally noted that in France and Italy, many strategies target functional territories formed by conurbations or networks of small towns with a population of a few thousand inhabitants. In these cases, the functional link is often thematic, such as a common strategy for tourism. By pooling resources and establishing inter-municipal cooperation, these small towns are able to form a critical mass. The existence of such scenarios sheds light on the nature of the “functional area” category used for SUD policy, and makes clear that the functional area approach can be used for different types of territories, beyond metropolitan areas.



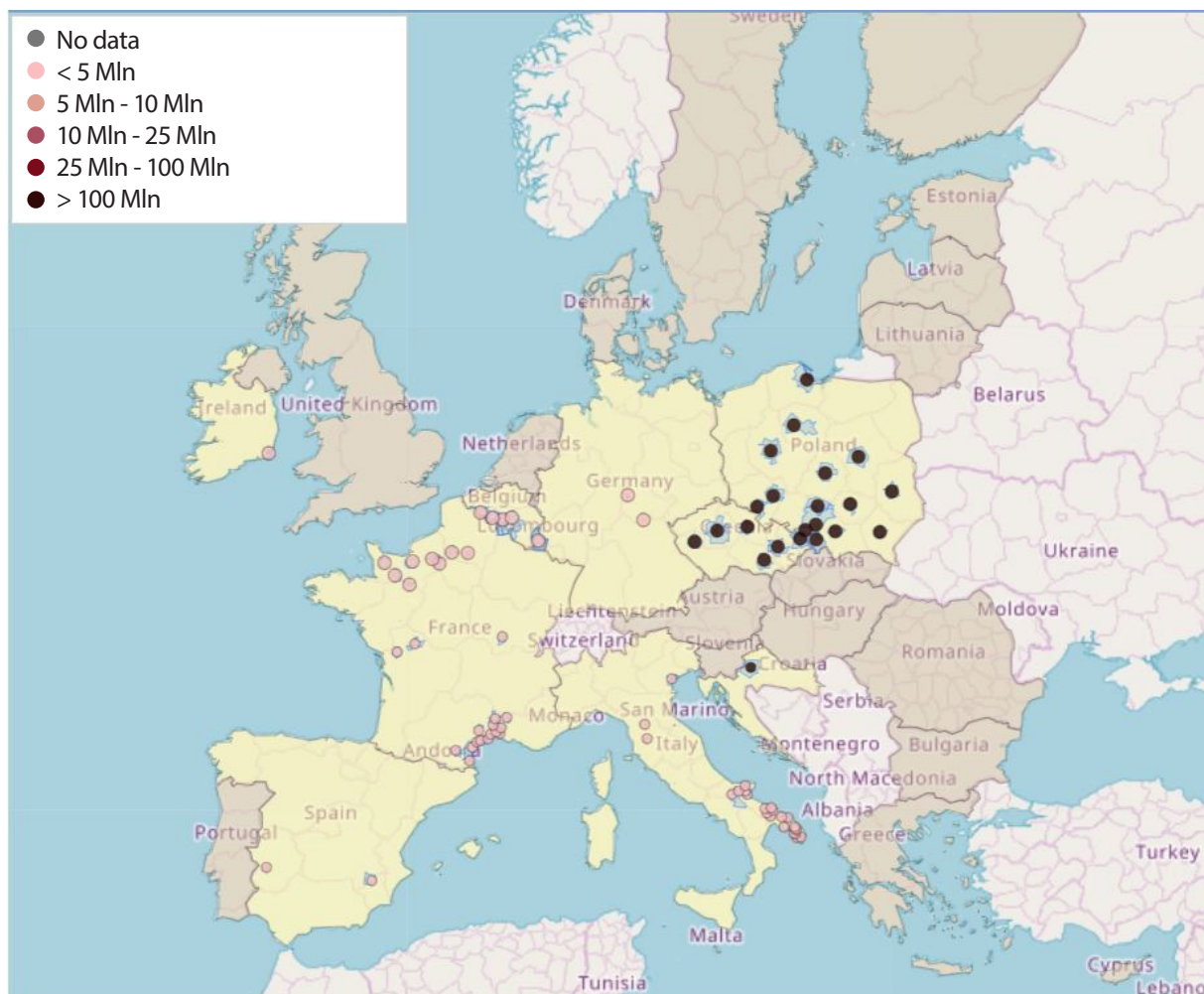


Figure 5 - Map of strategies targeting functional areas with largest and smallest ESIF contribution.  
Source: STRAT-Board

To unveil the thematic focus of strategies, the STRAT-Board database collected information on the thematic objectives (TO)<sup>12</sup> supported by ESIF in each strategy. In addition, in the survey, Managing Authorities were asked to identify all the key words<sup>13</sup> that could qualitatively describe each strategy.

The data shows that strategies targeting FUAs used more TO4, 'Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors' while strategies targeting neighbourhoods used largely TO9 'Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination' (respectively 209 and 217 out of 266). Moreover, a focus on transport (TO7) was almost exclusively directed to FUAs as opposed to other territorial foci.

These thematic priorities are confirmed when looking at key words characterising strategies. Notably, the first two key words for FUAs are "mobility" (76% of the sample) and "energy" (52%). Even if "spatial planning" is not frequently selected, there are other key words concerning spatial issues which often recurred, for example,

12 In the 2014-2020 programming period, the European Structural and Investment Funds, in particular the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund, support 11 investment priorities, also known as thematic objectives. More information on thematic objectives can be found here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303&from=EN>. Sustainable Urban Development strategies must address at least two TOs.

13 The survey provided a list of 29 key words: Social inclusion; Air quality; Housing; Circular economy; Digital transition; Mobility; Jobs and skills; Energy; Climate adaptation; Urban-rural linkages; Nature based solutions; Governance; Entrepreneurship and SMEs; Health; Ageing; Migrants; Research and innovation; Abandoned spaces; Culture and heritage; Youth; Low carbon; Education; Social innovation; Disadvantaged neighbourhoods; Gender equality; Participation; Public spaces; City management; Spatial planning.



“public spaces” (43%), and “abandoned spaces” (39%). Social issues (social inclusion, housing, disadvantaged neighbourhoods) were still important for functional areas, but less than in the overall sample of strategies, while “entrepreneurship” and “jobs and skills” were both especially aimed towards FUAs.

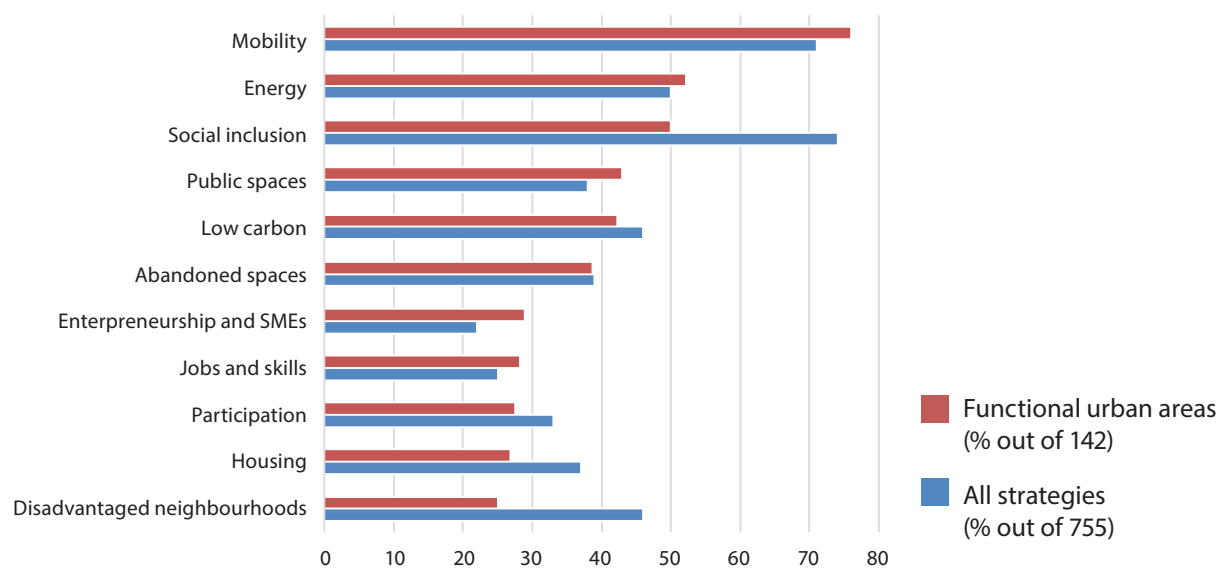


Figure 6 - First 11 key words for FUAs, with percentage of use for FUAs strategies, and for all strategies.

Alternatively, the key word “urban-rural linkages” was selected in only 8 percent of the cases despite the fact it would be ideally suited for wider territorial scopes. It is also true that, although supported by EU policy orientations and regulations, it remains a difficult theme for urban strategies to handle. Two important key terms which characterise the new urban question in the literature as well as in EU policy documents; “climate adaptation” and “migration”, were hardly ever found across FUAs strategies (respectively in 11% and 0% of cases).

In conclusion, it seems that the functional area approach is currently used to address more traditional physical or infrastructural issues as well as economic/job related issues. Social themes traditionally associated with core cities/districts, such as social inclusion, housing or deprived neighbourhood are also entering the discourse relating to FUAs to a greater or lesser extent. Most up-to-date themes, which probably require more innovative solutions, struggle to enter the mainstream policymaking.

## 5. Challenges in the Implementation of the Functional Area Approach

Considering the relative novelty of the functional area approach, it is no surprise that putting it in place can be challenging for those bodies in charge of designing and implementing SUD strategies. When designing a strategy, the first challenge relates to the fact that, in many cases, the perimeter of the specific functional area is not given in advance, but is established specifically for the development of the SUD strategy. According to the SPIMA project (ESPON, 2018) instead of the OECD/EC definition of FUAs, local stakeholders tend to use different approaches to delineate their functional areas. In the case of SUD, the establishment of the perimeter should be based on data evidence, but it depends not only on the territorial characteristics of the area, but also on the objective of the strategy, as well as the relationships that exist among local actors (Davoudi, 2008).

This is why the perimeter of the strategic functional areas in SUD seldom corresponds to the statistical FUAs defined by OECD/EC methodology. This becomes evident through spatial analysis. When superposing and comparing the two types of areas, it becomes clear that only in half of the cases is there a significant overlap between the two (defined as more than 66% of the strategic functional area overlapping with the statistical FUA). The perimeter hardly ever fits perfectly, but in the majority of cases (for example in France, Italy, Poland, and the Czech Republic) the strategic area is smaller than the statistical one. Only in a few cases (in Croatia, Belgium, and the United Kingdom) the strategic area is larger than the statistical. Furthermore, there are many

cases (for example in Greece, Spain, Austria, and France) where the strategic functional areas do not correspond at all with the individual country's statistical FUAs.

Functional areas in SUD can be defined through criteria that are decided at national, regional, or local levels. Arguably, to ensure optimal strategic planning, when the perimeter is decided at a national or regional level (in compliance or not with existing frameworks) some adaptability is required to allow better adjustment to local circumstances.

An example of this can be found in Poland where the territorial scope of the SUD strategies is defined on the basis of national guidelines that set socio-economic criteria to delimit functional areas around regional capital cities. However, there is some flexibility as shown by the fact that whilst the Lublin SUD strategy follows the same criteria, these were revised locally to include other municipalities on the basis of their important functional relations with the regional capital city. Another example is that of the Italian Region of Veneto (Figure 7) where the regional Managing Authority defined five eligible FUAs following an adapted version of the OECD/EC methodology, but allowed local administrations to define the specific target areas for the SUD strategies with more flexibility<sup>14</sup>.

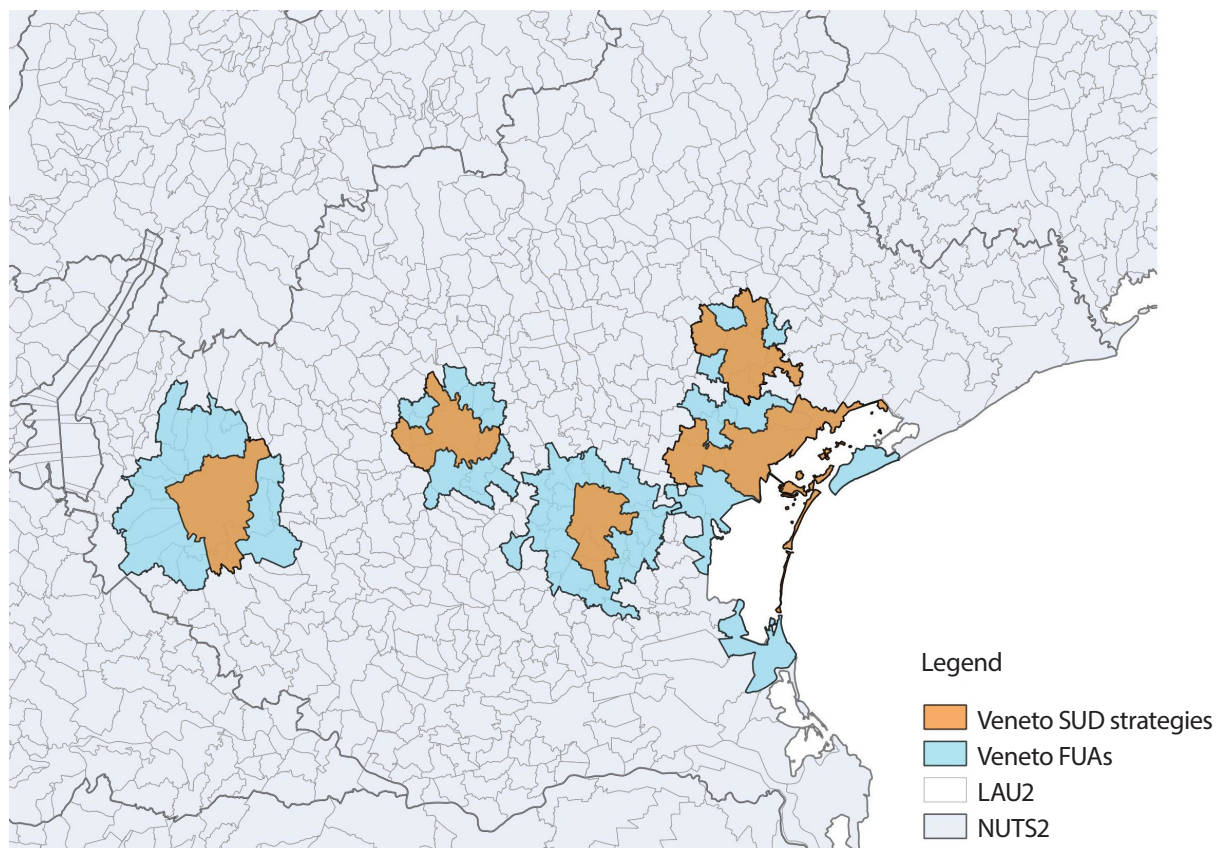


Figure 7 - Areas targeted by five strategies in Veneto compared to the FUAs

Key to a successful delineation of boundaries is to have access to data that allows appropriate indicators and criteria upon which areas will be defined, to be determined. This is especially important when the functional area is explicitly or uniquely defined by the strategy. It is difficult to retrieve comparable and homogeneous data across multiple municipalities and, accordingly, being able to identify the appropriate indicators is not only important with regards to the delineation of functional areas, but also extremely relevant in the phase of designing and monitoring strategies. In order to collect and harmonize this data, administrations need to establish partnerships with local universities and/or research institutes. An example of where this has

14 To these five strategies another one was added which does not target any of Veneto's FUA, and covers the area of Asolano-Castellana-Montebellunese.

happened in Brno, where collaboration with the local university led to the development of an evidence-based method to delimit the targeted area. The delimitation was based on an analysis of spatial arrangements and the intensity of spatial (functional) relations, and used five main indicators: commuting to work; commuting to school; migration flows; public transport accessibility; and individual transport accessibility. As a result, the Brno Metropolitan Area (BMA) is rather similar to the one established by the OECD-EC definition of FUA. The BMA has become a relevant scale for territorial analysis since 2014. Since then, several studies processes have covered the wider territorial area.

The implementation of the SUD strategy also served as an important trigger for the establishment of inter-municipal cooperation where this was previously lacking. It was a test case for implementing organisational integration in terms of a common coordinated approach to the engagement of territorial stakeholders based on the partnership principle. The process was not exempt from challenges that could hinder cooperation (scale imbalances among municipalities, contradictory priorities emerging from diverse territories, conflicts among decision makers); nonetheless, it seems particularly relevant that the functional area approach has been internalised by other processes, and has become a catalyst for innovative institutional metropolitan cooperation (Feřtrov, 2018).

As the case of Brno highlights, when there is a lack of a common institutional framework, consensus and cooperation among different public administrations become not only more crucial, but also more challenging. Territorial integration requires the creation of governance systems that enable policy coherence in spatially and economically homogenous, but politically fragmented, areas. The choice of how to proceed can be different according to the previous experience in terms of territorial cooperation. Referring more specifically to metropolitan governance, OECD (2015) identified four types of possible arrangements:

- informal/soft co-ordination, lightly institutionalised platforms for information and sharing;
- inter-municipal authorities, that can be single purpose in order to share costs and responsibilities, or multipurpose, embracing a defined range of key policies for urban development;
- supra-municipal authorities, in terms of an additional layer above municipalities through an elected or non-elected government structure;
- special status “metropolitan cities”, for cities that exceed a certain population threshold, to gain broader competences.

In the framework of SUD strategies there is a wide variety of different cooperation arrangements, with these being more or less stringent from the institutional viewpoint. In Poland, for example, central government guidance stipulated two possible models for cooperation: to form an association of municipalities, or to reach formal agreement between municipalities. Some smaller municipalities that have limited experience of working together have opted for formal agreements, whereas some larger municipalities that already possess experience with similar initiatives have opted for the association model. Governance arrangements become even more complex when strategies involve actions on multiple scales. In many cases in France, even when the strategy has covered a metropolitan area, or a large agglomeration, interventions have targeted neighbourhoods within the given area.

In addition, there can be problems of political legitimisation and responsibility with respect to new territorial dimensions (OECD, 2015). These can be even more substantial in cases where power imbalances exist among the municipalities that constitute the functional area. In order to promote and support territorial integration, new bodies have emerged in a number of Member States, or existing bodies have taken on new roles. These bodies may facilitate collaboration between different localities, take on responsibilities for management and implementation, or act in an advisory capacity. It seems therefore, that a coherent functional area planning approach requires the establishment of a shared governance process that enables dynamic interaction across spatial scales, policy issues, land-use functions, and a wide range of stakeholders.

## 6. Conclusion

Cities in Europe have changed and trends towards urban regionalization have raised new urban questions. Even if the European city model has been proven to be quite stable (Le Galès, 2018), the capacity to govern new urban configurations cannot be taken for granted (Rodríguez-Pose, 2008).

EU urban policy discourse seems to have acknowledged the emergence of new spatialities. One of the main signs of this is the emphasis that has been put on the new territorial typology of FUAs. Born as a statistical categorisation, the concept has also entered policy discourses, and is today used to indicate strategic planning spaces to promote SUD.

This was also seen in the implementation of SUD strategies during the 2014-2020 Cohesion Policy programming period. The analysis shows, in fact, a growing trend towards developing strategic frameworks for wider territorial areas, across administrative boundaries. Meanwhile the analysis also shows that in those cases it is not correct to talk about strategies applied to FUAs as intended in the statistical definition. The areas targeted by the strategies in the majority of cases do not overlap with FUAs, in some cases they involve conurbations of small-medium sized towns outside metropolitan regions, in some cases twin cities. It follows that it is more appropriate to talk of a functional area approach which identifies spaces – usually different from those defined by administrative boundaries – in which a specific territorial interdependence (or function) occurs which may need to be governed jointly.

There are implications in adopting this new approach to EU supported policy-making. In particular, it entails a need to establish new governance systems, across administrative boundaries and scales which will trigger cooperation processes among municipalities often in the absence of pre-existing institutional frameworks. In such cases, there are various practices which can be observed across the EU. However, the possibility of using these new strategic planning spaces to tackle the most urgent emerging urban questions still seems remote. The questions addressed so far are more related to traditional physical or infrastructural issues as well as economic/job related issues, while more up-to-date themes, perhaps requiring more innovative solutions, remain largely unconsidered.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that the functional area approach could become a new paradigm for EU supported policy making. This will be even more relevant in the upcoming Cohesion Policy programming period 2021-2027, as FUAs will be explicitly identified as a focus for integrated territorial and development strategies (COM/2018/375 final - 2018/0196), and the functional area approach is supported by the new Leipzig Charter, as well as by the Territorial Agenda 2030.

However, it seems that a consolidated common approach for functional areas in strategic terms is still not shared across the EU. While numerous efforts have been made to find a common statistical definition of FUA, clarification is still needed on both the conceptual framework of the functional area approach, and with regards to shared policy methodology.<sup>15</sup> A more profound debate around this topic should be promoted which acknowledges the different interpretations generated in various countries, and defines more clearly the pillars characterising such an approach.

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<sup>15</sup> A first attempt was promoted by the Romanian presidency of the Council of European Union in 2019, see Ministry of the Regional Development and Public administration, Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Functional areas and the role of the FUA for territorial cohesion. Input paper, 2019.

## Disclaimer

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