

Chapter 7

Urban and Regional Planning for Territorial Cohesion



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Abstract Territorial cohesion has gained significant influence in urban and regional planning at different scales. Aiming at the ‘balanced’ development of European regions and cities, the policy is central for the harmonisation of planning across and beyond European borders. From the Torremolinos Charter, the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion to today’s Territorial Agenda 2030, European documents gained currency and shaped the national understanding of redistribution and mutual territorial responsibilities. Through a variety of funding programmes, supporting urban, rural development as well as (cross-border) cooperation between territories, cohesion policy promotes functional approaches to integrated development and place-based approaches. However, being also addressed as a policy ‘black box’, unable to navigate precise planning action, it gains its strength but also shows its greatest weakness by providing a canvas for differing projections. Increased global–local competition and the policy’s continuing growth-orientation furthermore raised questions about its actual contribution to local sustainability and spatial justice. Nevertheless, today European funding has become an essential source in regional development, sought-after by centres as well as peripheries. The present chapter gives an overview on territorial cohesion’s origins and discusses its contribution for European territorial development and planning.

Keywords European Territorial Cohesion · Sustainable development · Spatial justice · Urban and regional planning

7.1 Introduction

With the evolution of EU Cohesion policy, the concept of cohesion was introduced as a mutual guiding term to promote and support the balanced development of European regions. Cohesion itself is a relatively broad concept, addressed by multiple disciplines without a precise definition to refer to. Discussed early in behavioural

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and social sciences, it can be understood as a basic bond in groups (Piper et al. 1983). With its codification in European documents, in particular since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has set its objectives towards the ‘strengthening of economic and social cohesion’ (CEC 1992). Nonetheless, the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) early studies soon acknowledged that economic and social dimensions are interlinked with a spatial component (CEC 1991, 1995). Growing interconnectivity between EU member states, the competition of the single market and the economic and monetary union, fuelled by transport, mobility growth and new communication technologies led to fundamental challenges for national spatial development and planning. As such, these challenges were no longer separable from macroregional territorial debates.

Amid growing concerns regarding regional imbalances across the member states, the aim to reduce disparities between the levels of development of various regions came into policy focus. Addressing the uneven spatial dynamics, apparent between old and new member states, the benefits of collaborating on spatial development issues across national boundaries gained recognition (Dühr et al. 2007). This further raised the awareness for regional linkages and the need for coordinated territorial action as precondition for European cohesion. The growing interest of European institutions in transnational cooperation and territorial coordination built the basis for the policy’s understanding in discussions on urban and regional development.

This book chapter deals with European territorial cohesion policy and its evolution as tool in urban and regional planning practice. It firstly gives a general overview on the conceptual background of the policy and further points out its present implementation challenges. The empirical background builds on the authors’ research on territorial policy governance and implementation dynamics in European cross-border-cooperation programmes (Interreg) in Central Europe. Further, recent claims towards just and sustainable spatial development in the context of territorial cohesion will be discussed to point out relevant discourses shaping spatial planning policies. Finally, the conclusion summarises the central arguments and gives an outlook towards promising topics for European development and planning.

7.2 Territorial Cohesion and Spatial Planning

Discussions on the harmonisation of spatial development and planning across European territories started in the late 1980s, spurred by the growing need for mutual spatial decisions (van Gestel and Faludi 2005). Globalisation, liberalisation and locational competition increased the uneven regional impacts across the member states and led to the emergence of territorial cohesion as a European planning objective during the 1990s (Nordregio et al. 2007). Especially the Torremolinos Charter (CEC 1983) set the general objectives for European spatial planning and significantly shaped territorial cohesion’s understanding. Its objectives emphasised the balanced socio-economic development of regions, the improvement of the quality of life, the responsible management of natural resources and environmental protection, but also

the rational use of land. This was based on the belief in the benefits of intensified cooperative spatial activities. Influencing European regional planning strategies, this also shaped the further discussion on European territorial cohesion. Acknowledging the spatial dimension of cohesion, alongside economic and social cohesion, the term territorial cohesion was officially referred to in the Amsterdam Treaty (CEC 1997).

In the aftermath, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC 1999) took the first step towards turning the vague principles of the concept into a more applicable policy framework. It highlighted horizontal and vertical dimensions of cooperation at various levels and targeted a more balanced development of European territories, following a redistributive understanding. Concluding that uncoordinated development would lead towards growing territorial disparities, the ESDP identified the need to stronger protect especially structurally weaker regions but also called for a greater exchange of experience, cooperation, better monitoring and evaluation of spatial developments (CEC 1999). With overall gaps in comparative, quantifiable and geo-referenced data across European territories becoming evident in the course of the ESDP preparation, the idea of a long-term cross-national research programme on relevant spatial issues gained momentum. In 2002 this was realised through the creation of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) (van Gestel and Faludi 2005), that since then provides important planning relevant territorial information across the member states.

Through ESPON, understood as European grouping on territorial cooperation, also the territorial dimension in European policies, increased significantly. Nevertheless, while territorial cohesion was addressed from the second cohesion report on (CEC 2001b), it still took about ten years until it was also formally included as cohesion policy's third pillar through the Lisbon Treaty (CEC 2007b). With that, also a first action plan for European Union's Territorial Agenda (TA) was introduced (BMUB 2007), serving as framework document for a Union wide perspective for strategic spatial planning. Aiming for global competitiveness and at the same time sustainability of European regions, it envisioned territorial cohesion in particular as a permanent and cooperative process involving various actors and stakeholders. This understanding particularly reflected the successful implementation of European territorial cooperation programmes. Introduced in the early 1990s, European Interreg A, B and C (cross-border, transnational and interregional) cooperation programmes early proofed the success of co-operative spatial activities as a key instrument to tackle regional disadvantages and address shared challenges (Dühr et al. 2007). As an early community initiative Interreg aimed at the implementation of Community policies at regional levels, supporting regional development, innovation, cooperation and know-how exchange (CEC 1993).

Overall, with growing influence, territorial cohesion became increasingly understood as opposing process to regional weaknesses, counteracting existent disparities (CEC 2007a, 2017a). However, less 'fashionable' at first, through being a mostly reactive and self-centred policy, it was often considered intangible in regional practice (Nordregio et al. 2007). The policy's combination of spatial development and planning notions from two diverging planning traditions, namely the French (focussed on territorial disparities) and the German (concerned with the coordination of spatial

impacts of sectoral policies), further added to the conceptual vagueness of territorial cohesion (Davoudi 2005). To clarify the conceptual understanding across the member states, the Commission released the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, titled ‘turning diversity into strength’ (CEC 2008). In the aftermath, a member state-wide call for stakeholder contributions on the Green Paper intended to gain deeper insights into the national and regional understanding of territorial cohesion and its added value for regional planning. However, given the variety of responses, this approach also made the differing national and regional stakeholder perceptions of the concept evident (Abrahams 2014).

Cohesion policy in general underwent significant reforms over time and turned steadily towards aims supporting greater comparability, transparency, efficiency and result orientation, especially during the preparation for the funding period post 2013 (Barca 2009). Nonetheless, despite a number of attempts to clarify territorial cohesion for regional policies, the challenge remains to date to translate the concept into an understandable, coherent term for coordinated territorial action. Stretching across aims for good governance, networking, territorial cooperation, coordination, regional competitiveness and sustainable development (Faludi 2006, 2007; Medeiros 2016) the broad range of thematic objectives led to repeated non-academic and academic discussions on its rather confusing (Begg 2010) and black box-like (Zonneveld and Waterhout 2005) character. Therefore, some scholars pointed out that this is leading towards an overall policy fuzziness, leaving room for multiple, hardly comparable regional interpretations (Dühr et al. 2007; Faludi 2007; Begg 2010; Abrahams 2014; Medeiros 2016; Demeterova et al. 2020b). Lacking a common understanding, it was accompanied by multiple calls for further definition and greater transparency in order to strategically assess its actual territorial impacts (van Well 2012; Medeiros 2014, 2016; Zaucha and Böhme 2019).

In general, many scholars focused their analysis on economic indicators of cohesion, due to the ease of comparison (Sala-i-Martin 1996; Niebuhr and Stiller 2003; Tvrdon 2012, Zaucha and Böhme 2019), turning to economic models like the input–output analysis (Medeiros 2016). Territorial cohesion was also addressed by using two essentialist models: the tree and the storyline model (Abrahams 2014). While the tree model tries to generate composite indicators, defining the central concept and branching out across its dimensions, the storyline model analyses essential traits common to the concept in policy documents and its wider contexts (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003; Faludi and Waterhout 2006; OECD 2008). Though these approaches appear to be dominant in the discussion on the understanding of territorial cohesion, Abrahams (2014) pointed out that conceptual definitions might be an inadequate method for understanding and assessing the concept in territorial practice. He argues, that these models are unable to explain what the concept ‘does’ in different territorial contexts (Abrahams 2014) and calls for more pragmatic approaches and stronger context-specific studies. Taking a different position, some empirical studies emphasized the essential, functional role played by fuzzy concepts. Arguing that, despite lacking conceptual clarity, these approaches can provide a plan and serve as a strategy to evade potential implementation barriers by functioning as a bridging concept

(Faludi 2007). Faludi (2001) identifies the advantage of ‘fuzziness’ in enabling planning concepts to become adaptable in different ways and working within existing or emerging policy frameworks. At the same time, fuzziness can also affect the comparability of supra-regional interventions and hamper planning coordination (Markusen 1999). Holding this balance between the policy’s general comparability and at the same time applicability in heterogeneous regional settings remains a challenge ever since.

7.3 Cohesion, Growth and Sustainability in Planning

Through a variety of funding programmes, supporting urban (e.g. URBACT), rural development (e.g. LEADER) as well as territorial cooperation (e.g. Interreg), cohesion policy provides functional approaches to an integrated spatial development. With the increased demand for territorial coordination to tackle mutual challenges, the second territorial agenda, the TA 2020 (CEC 2011), already highlighted territorial cohesion as a common goal for a ‘harmonious and balanced’ European development. Targeting a more synchronised approach, the TA 2020 put an emphasis on the coordination of sectoral policies to optimise territorial impacts and policy coherence.

However, alongside the coordinative elements, territorial cohesion policy provides central objectives for European spatial development and planning. Considering that the EU is bound to three principles determining how and in what areas it may act, namely conferred authority, proportionality and subsidiarity, it has nevertheless only limited powers to guide the actual regional policy across the Member States (EC 2022). But, being an important investment policy, it has significantly gained relevance in regional development decisions by providing essential financial instruments for selected European investment priorities. Due to the attractiveness of the regional funds, co-financing infrastructural and overall investment projects, this has been especially the case for economically weaker regions, partially dependent on external funding.

With growing relevance for national policies, also a focus towards economic growth and regional competitiveness consolidated alongside more sustainability-oriented development aims. By the turn of the millennium, based on the Lisbon Strategy (CEC 2001c) and the Gothenburg Strategy (CEC 2001a), ‘competitive and sustainable development’ became the two overarching development principles in European territorial policy (Nordregio et al. 2007). Aiming for “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” (CEC 2001c: 1) both strategies proclaimed that “economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand” (CEC 2001a: 2). Thereby, the strategies coined the understanding that growth, sustainability and socially balanced development can be achieved at the same time through appropriate policy measures and technical progress. However, the present aims for European ‘green growth’ like the European Green Deal (CEC 2019), boosting economic competitiveness while fostering sustainable development, seem to follow a rather contradictory understanding of balanced development. Some scholars pointed out that building on ‘trust’ in future technical

innovations that solve negative environmental impacts while aiming for a growing, competitive economy is an approach, unlikely to lead towards just, sustainable and balanced territorial pathways (Schmid 2019; Hickel and Kallis 2020).

Nonetheless, with the Europeanisation of regional and urban policy, a shift in favour of especially urban growth and global–local competitiveness has taken place (Dühr et al. 2007; Tvrdon 2012; Rauhut and Humer 2020). European key documents on territorial cohesion, such as ESDP (CEC 1999) or the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (CEC 2008), solidified the understanding that economic growth spreads more or less evenly across European regions and benefits them all, applying the model of polycentric development. But, as Rauhut and Humer (2020) point out, these are also trajectories in economic thought. Since agglomeration economies are increasingly cut loose locally, they largely lack the expected distributional effects to their surroundings while at the same time fuelling inter- and intra-regional imbalances (Sassen 2001; Luukkonen 2010; Tvrdon 2012; Mulíček and Malý 2019). Considering lingering regional disparities across and within European territories (CEC 2017b; Hacker 2021), it seems rather likely that spatial policies tend to overlook localised social and environmental inequities arising from global market dynamics and regional competition. As dysfunctional growth dynamics continue to selectively provide prosperity for some regions, the wellbeing of others is simultaneously put at risk. This is not only endangering the overall territorial cohesion processes but also a spatially just and sustainable development.

7.4 Regional Planning Practices—Examples from Central European Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes (Interreg)

7.4.1 Relational Added Value in Heterogenous Regional Settings

With territorial cohesion's policy implementation bound to multi-level governance and differing regional coordination systems, its implementation is shaped by structural complexity and dependence on local structures. Since scientific approaches only limitedly address context-specific aspects of territorial cohesion in planning, Demeterova et al. (2020b) studied how territorial cohesion is being understood and applied in a complex, cross-border setting. Therefore, the aim was to assess regional stakeholders' understanding of territorial cohesion and its added value for regional development. This allowed a reflection upon the respective conditions that shape the territorial configuration of the concept. The study focused on three European Interreg cross-border cooperation programmes (Interreg A) in the Austrian–Czech–Slovak–Hungarian border region in Central Europe. Choosing a multiple-case design it looked at different implementation practices (centralist vs. federal planning)

and the local cohesion policy understanding in a heterogenous spatial setting. The study applied a mixed methods approach to better account for the complex regional dynamics. It traced the implementing actors' understanding and translation of territorial cohesion in the context of cross-border cooperation, combining a policy analysis with regional stakeholder interviews.

The results demonstrated that the stakeholder translation of territorial cohesion was structured along three key dimensions, namely a relational, economic, and a social dimension. These three dimensions described how territorial cohesion is understood and configured in relation to a given space, varying in different territorial contexts. Mirroring the long separation through the iron curtain within the case study region, in relational, economic, social and administrative terms, the 'added value' of territorial cohesion was strongly conceptualised along a relational dimension. This was seen as a central precondition for the further economic and social cohesion. Furthermore, the results displayed that considerable disconnects in both, the conceptual understanding of 'what territorial cohesion should do' and its implementation, seem to persist at multiple levels. While regional stakeholders overwhelmingly expressed the wish for greater conceptual clarification from the European Commission, they simultaneously benefitted from the fuzziness that allowed for a translation in accordance with their own regional needs.

However, while fuzzy conceptualisation secures territorial cohesion's broader acceptance, it also tends to increase a policy language that refers to more general regional processes. Missing responsibilities however fail to account for individual or collective action while also risking displacing the regional actors from the process (Callon 1984). With intensified pressure to justify territorial cohesion's 'added value' for territorial development, the search for comparable indicators intensified notably in the past decade. But, considering the different understandings of the concept and the often inadequate 'one size fits all' indicators for regional processes, the comparability of reported programme data was put under question. Especially in territorial contexts where relational aspects of cohesion are perceived as the greatest added value for development, the dominant quantitative indicators are unlikely to reflect the concept's 'softer' practical effects in the region. Although more bottom-up, participatory approaches gained policy attention, the concept's fuzziness was running danger to suppress agency and causality and thus hinder actual change processes. Overall, the study found that multiple cohesion policy translations have produced dynamics that create a circular process through which the fuzziness of territorial cohesion policy is reproduced. The findings demonstrated the context-dependency of territorial cohesion translations and the conceptual elasticity in the case region. With a strong relational added value for the regions, the actors' perspective hints towards multiple inter- and intrapersonal dynamics that accompany the policy implementation process, rarely reflected in present policy documents.

7.4.2 *Regional Inequalities and the Right to Difference*

Despite cohesion policy efforts, unequal social, economic and environmental development dynamics across Europe continue to persist. Therefore, there is the need to investigate regional inequalities beyond a redistributive understanding of a balanced development. Research in the Austrian–Czech–Slovak–Hungarian border region revealed tensions between measurement-based, growth-oriented cohesion policy logics and its aims towards spatially just, sustainable transformations.

Picking up on the argument for regional ‘right to difference’ (Young, 1990), Demeterova et al. (2020a) discussed the spatial dimension of justice and the role of local capabilities (Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Dikeç 2001) for place-based development against European regional disparities. Economic data and regional documents analysed demonstrated lingering disparities between centres and peripheries as well as differences in regional development dynamics. The analysed GDP-data showed that all four analysed urban centre regions (Vienna, Prague, Bratislava and Budapest) have remained above the EU GDP-average threshold between 2006 and 2017, continuing to outpace their surrounding regions in the concentration of GDP. Showing different growth tendencies and pointing towards growing regional divergences, actual regional centre-peripheries spillovers seem questionable, rather pointing towards an economical decoupling of urban centres. Taking the three cross-border-cooperation programmes analysed (Interreg A Austria–Czech Republic, Interreg A Slovakia–Austria and Interreg A Austria–Hungary), though showing similar development needs in the border regions, different priority settings for territorial investments were chosen. With differing implementation states (in 2018) of the cooperation programmes, more underlying heterogeneous regional dynamics seem to affect the regional planning and implementation processes.

However, kept rather general, the annual implementation reports (AIR) hardly reflected on the programmes’ implementation success beyond the general economic performance. Moreover, the different evaluation approaches for the programmes’ evaluation raised questions on the overall comprehensiveness and comparability of the reported data. Nonetheless, all three programmes reflected well-being, economic and environmental aspects of cohesion, comprising justice and sustainability components. Taking also into account the statements from additionally conducted stakeholder interviews in the case region, tensions between the current programme’s logics and local capabilities for development became apparent. Picking up Nussbaum’s (2013) critique on macroeconomic synthetic indicators to depict developmental progress, the study found that the current representation of development ‘success’ more likely allows the maintenance of the regional status quo rather than serving actual transition processes.

Considering the empirical findings, the study also observed a strong resource distribution-oriented logic in European policy implementation, rather than an orientation towards capabilities. Also showing that regional diversity is likely to reproduce uneven territorial impacts under present policy logics, it illustrated the context and scale dependency of the cohesion measures in the analysed regions. Therefore, the

study questioned the effectiveness of uniform planning interventions for sustainable development. With present development measures not being able to mitigate the continuance of existing spatial inequalities across the regions, the analysed data indicated that using growth-driven approaches for spatial development only limitedly capture all dimensions of territorial cohesion at the regional scale. More likely, the regional dynamics show a catch-up-driven struggle for locational competition. Therefore, calling for the ‘right to not catch up’ as a thought experiment that interlinks spatial justice and territorial sustainability, the study joined long-running critiques on territorial cohesion’s implementation and measurement, with increasing dissatisfaction with business-as-usual models. The spatial justice approach shows potential to better reflect horizontal aspects, like access to and provision of resources, as well as vertical aspects of justice, like participation, self-determination and power relations, by focussing on regional capabilities. Supporting the right to difference, a spatial justice perspective could therefore also account for non-linear regional transition processes that allow for a post-growth paradigm. The study thus pointed out the need for a general reframing and rescaling of what is considered a successful development for more balanced and sustainable spatial processes across European regions.

7.5 Learning Goals and Place-Based Approaches for Just- and Sustainable Development

Considering the introduced implementation in central European border regions, it becomes apparent that territorial development is strongly bound to actor centred processes and explicit local development dynamics. Thereby, cohesion policy implementation is on the one hand structured along relational components. On the other hand, as regional diversity is posing a thread and at the same time is bearing potentials for spatial development, it too plays a central role for future just and sustainable territorial approaches.

Building on the observations made in the studies on central European cross-border-cooperation and territorial development, a reorientation on what is being considered successful development seems like an option worthwhile considering. Given the tendency of European cohesion policy to choose the same growth-oriented answers to regional needs, despite the continuance of regional disparities, Demeterova (2022, in press) asked for more general, underlying discourses in European territorial policies that in turn shape local development strategies. The study therefore investigated past and present cohesion and environmental policy goal settings effecting actual European spatial planning. Joining Pike’s et al. (2007) critique on too generalist regional policy frameworks, risking to reduce social, environmental and territorial challenges for easy to address, measurable and solely technical questions, it analysed present development discourses in the context of territorial cohesion, justice and sustainability. With regards to resilient development and planning responses from an actor’s perspective, it discussed interdisciplinary approaches for

relational planning (Kurath et al. 2018), learning (Dweck 1986, 1999) and social action (Argyris 1993). Using a qualitative content analysis (Silverman 2006) the study focussed on selected European cohesion policy regulations and framework documents for sustainable territorial development and action (Common Provisions Regulations for Cohesion Policy, European Territorial Agendas and the Environmental Action Programmes). To assess the framing process over time, the study investigated the central documents for the past 2014–2020 and present 2021–2027 cohesion policy funding period. Furthermore, using the framing analysis approach as a conceptual and analytic tool (Shmueli 2008), five central framing categories were selected (understanding, goalsetting, problematisation, solution/action and the characterisation of progress) to assess the framing of present approaches towards sustainable development and justice in European territorial planning policies.

Overall, the documents, appeared to frame sustainable and just development either as a resource management, a coordinative task or as a process of taking informed actions. This understanding then guided their further focus setting on the chosen five framing categories. The results indicated that the first frame, the understanding of sustainable development, was strongly structured along categories such as distributive balance, spatial justice or systemic transition. When it comes to the framing of goalsetting and prioritisation, the focus was laid towards growth and competitiveness, territorial integration or coherence and synergies. Though addressing multiple fields for action, the general problematisation was mostly framed through the lenses of territorial disparities, insufficient cooperation and coordination, or as a deficient knowledge and inaction. Taking the framing of mobilisation and solution approaches, the rhetoric was mainly structured along the need for financial management, ensuring synergies and multi-level-governance as well as the need for stronger knowledge and capacity building. Finally, the characterisation of progress appeared to be framed along territorial performance, the territorial impacts, well-being and ownership-centred approaches to development. While over time, the documents remained to keep a growth and performance orientation, the new funding period documents stronger reflected regional diversity, place sensitivity and justice components in spatial processes.

Also, in contrast to the Cohesion Policy Provisions and the Territorial Agendas, the European Environmental Action Programmes showed that a strong sustainable transition orientation comes along with knowledge and capacity building and more systemic approaches to development. With regional policy approaches the tendency to focus on growth, through so-called ‘performance’ goals, lingering disparities point towards ‘helpless’ rather than ‘resilient’ regional responses (Dweck 1999; Grant and Dweck 2003). Thereby, considered through the lens of organisational psychology, given the importance of relational components of policy implementation, the regions could become ‘stuck’, not being able to adapt to novel challenges and explore their full capabilities. Taking up this perspective, the study proposed a stronger emphasis on ‘learning goals’ in European cohesion policy instead as a promising alternative towards sustainable transitions. This focus allows for stronger acknowledgement of regional learning, actor-centred processes, relational aspects of planning and at the same time leave enough space for capabilities’ oriented local development strategies. Not tied

to regional competitiveness limitations, adopting also open-ended goal settings in planning policies could foster transition processes that allow for more locally sensitive responses to present development challenges. Without mostly pre-set quantifiable outcomes, the stronger orientation towards qualitative ‘learning goals’ could open new perspectives on complex regional process and collective action-oriented approaches in European territorial development and planning.

7.6 Conclusion

The present book chapter focussed on aspects that influence urban and regional planning in the context of European territorial cohesion policy. Addressing its growing influence in European spatial planning, it pointed towards the policy’s struggle between keeping a general comparability and at the same time remain applicable in heterogenous regional settings. Referring to its focus on increased cooperative activities to tackle mutual regional challenges, it also highlighted the policy’s significance for regional investments and growing relevance for national policies. These developments steadily led to a policy focus in favour of economic growth and regional competitiveness, alongside sustainability-oriented aims. Especially the Lisbon Strategy (CEC 2001c) and the Gothenburg Strategy (CEC 2001a) coined these two overarching development and planning principles. They aligned European spatial strategies towards growth and competition oriented and at the same time sustainable development principles. However, though ‘green growth’ concepts had a significant influence on European policies, such as the European Green Deal (CEC 2019), they are also a contradiction in terms. Considering the negative environmental impacts arising from a strong economy together with the tendency of spatial policies to overlook localised social and environmental inequities, dysfunctional growth dynamics are likely to consolidate. Providing selectively prosperity for some regions, mostly the centre-regions, the well-being of others is put at risk. Given the regional dynamics in the analysed Austrian–Czech–Slovakian–Hungarian border lands in Central Europe, the chapter points towards the need for reframing and rescaling of what is considered a successful development in the context of territorial cohesion policy. Furthermore, it called for the ‘right to not catch up’ as a thought experiment that could change the perspective on economically weaker regions, in order to allow for more spatially just and sustainable territorial dynamics.

Discussing long-running critiques on territorial cohesion’s implementation and measurement, with increasing dissatisfaction with business-as-usual models, a stronger spatial justice-oriented approach in planning could better reflect horizontal aspects in regional development. Thereby, alongside economic indicators, a greater focus on access to and provision of resources, as well as vertical aspects of justice, like participation, self-determination and power relations should be laid. Concluding that European cohesion policy is in need to move away from redistributive or compensatory logics towards more justice and capabilities-oriented, relational approaches to

territorial development and planning, also the idea of using stronger ‘learning goals’-oriented strategies has been introduced. Moving away from the dominant ‘performance goals’ focus in regional development would better reflect relational aspects of planning, learning processes and actor-centred dynamics. At the same time, it would leave enough space for capabilities-oriented, local development strategies towards sustainable regional transitions.

A positive step towards a more place-sensible, sustainable and just understanding of territorial processes can be considered the new TA 2030 (CEC 2020) together with the cohesion policy framework for the 2021–2027 (CEC 2021) planning period. Both started to strongly acknowledge the importance of the local dimension as decisive factor for a spatially just and balanced territorial development. With a stronger focus on place-based approaches (e.g. through community-led local development), also an emphasis on learning, sharing best practices and joint working groups was laid to support territorial policy implementation. By establishing the Just Transition Fund, also a new perspective towards justice in territorial processes was introduced, in line with territorial cohesion and place-based approaches. This serves the better acknowledgement regional diversity, taking a potential oriented perspective on diverse territorial settings (CEC 2020). Thereby, also territorial and local development strategies are likely to gain in significance, helping to create more diversified approaches towards just and sustainable regional transitions. Whatever will be the case, further academic work on urban and regional planning practices for territorial cohesion will have to prove.

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