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# A Critical Assessment of the Added Value of Territorial Cohesion

*Frank Othengrafen & Andreas P. Cornett*

## Abstract

This paper, by drawing on various interpretations or storylines of territorial cohesion and by referring to the national policy contexts in Denmark and Germany, critically assesses the concept of territorial cohesion and its added value by exploring what difference the formal recognition of territorial cohesion makes for EU, national and regional policymaking in terms of adapted policy objectives, altered perceptions of territory and place and modified policy instruments. It is argued herein that even though territorial cohesion obviously changes the rationales underlying the cohesion policies and strategic European spatial development policies by emphasising the potential of territorial capital for innovation and employment, the concept of territorial capital is not completely new. Some of the objectives or meanings can be found in former EU cohesion or spatial development policies; additionally, some EU member states such as Denmark have pursued this type of strategy since the early 1990s. Additionally, in Germany, instruments for social and economic cohesion already cover territorial aspects, meaning that the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion can critically be questioned. Furthermore, Denmark and Germany are both sceptical with regard to the introduction of new funding priorities and instruments; the old ones obviously work sufficiently as convergence among regions could be achieved from a country-by-country perspective. Nevertheless, an important advantage of the concept of territorial cohesion is that it offers added value for rethinking current (spatial) policies, strategies and instruments in EU member states that do not have such a long tradition or established system of spatial development policies. From this perspective, the concept of territorial cohesion has sharpened the attention paid to the territorial implications of European policies from a broader perspective, and thus it may serve as a conceptual tool to deal with these issues, not only from an economic but also from a spatial planning and policy coordination perspective.

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# 1. Introduction

Achieving territorial cohesion is particularly important since it has, alongside the existing objectives of economic and social cohesion, become a central objective for the European Union through the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. While there is no official definition of territorial cohesion, it is obvious that the concept complements economic and social cohesion and that it is primarily concerned with promoting a more balanced development and ensuring greater consistency between social, economic and environmental policies (European Parliament, 2009, p. 6; Davoudi, 2005; Faludi, 2007a, 2007b). In policy terms, the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, avoiding territorial imbalances and making both sectoral policies that have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent (CEC, 2004, p. 27; see also Faludi, 2004, p. 1349; OECD, 2001, p. 135). This is also in line with Faludi and Peyrony (2011, p. 5), who conclude that the most common understanding of territorial cohesion is that it ensures ‘a balanced – not to be equated with equal – spatial distribution of activities and people, promoting interdependency between regions and in so doing, the overall coherence of policies’.

The concept of territorial cohesion was introduced in the Commission’s second report on social and economic cohesion (CEC, 2001), arguing that ‘spatial balances could be conceived not only in terms of GDP per capita but also geographically, that is by focussing on regions that faced particular challenges such as border regions, mountainous regions or islands’ (Mirwaldt et al., 2009, p. 8). Following Robert (2007, p. 29), territorial cohesion commits policymakers to ‘recognise territorial imbalances and disparities in addition to socio-economic imbalances and ensure that policies and strategies take into account specific territorial and cultural characteristics, identities, and the potentials of regions (such as territorial capital), which are central to long-term, sustainable development.’ The Fifth Report on Social, Economic and Territorial Cohesion (CEC, 2010a, p. 24), as the first Cohesion Report adopted under the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, refers to these developments and elaborates further that ‘economic and social cohesion focuses on regional disparities in competitiveness and well-being’, whereas territorial cohesion ‘reinforces the importance of the territorial dimension of access to services, sustainable development, “functional geographies” and territorial cooperation, and territorial analysis or the question how the territorial impact of policies can be measured’.

Two conclusions can be drawn from these developments so far. First, the concept of territorial cohesion links cohesion policies and spatial planning or development perspectives. Territory and place are becoming decisive factors in delivering EU policies (CEC, 2010a; BBSR, 2012). Second, territorial cohesion represents a ‘loose collection of somewhat self-contradictory key concepts that have been produced over the years’ but that ‘remain relatively unelaborated’ (Evers, 2012, p. 3, 6). It is against this background that this article aims to assess the added value for the European economic and territorial development of the concept

of territorial cohesion by exploring what difference the formal recognition of territorial cohesion makes for EU, national and regional policy-making in practice (see also Böhme et al., 2011, p. 11). Therefore, both the direct and the indirect impacts (van Ravesteijn & Evers, 2004) of the concept of territorial cohesion are analysed and assessed by emphasising:

- Changes to policy objectives as a result of implementing the principles of territorial cohesion as a 'new' concept (e.g. the adaptation of existing policies to the principles of territorial cohesion) (Zonneveld & Waterhout, 2009, p. 6);
- Changes to the perception of territory and place as well as to the rationales and conceptual ideas related to territorial development (e.g. a different or adapted understanding of territorial imbalances and disparities); and
- Changes with regard to policy instruments that would not happen or would happen differently without the introduction of territorial cohesion as a concept (e.g. the introduction of new funding instruments or policies) (Zonneveld & Waterhout, 2009, p. 6).

The following sections of the article pick up these issues by presenting different rationales or interpretations of territorial cohesion. In a first step, the article, based on the review of relevant policy documents at the European level as well as a literature survey, analyses to what extent the different rationales are visible or implemented at the EU level (section 2). In a second step, it is discussed how territorial cohesion is understood in Germany and Denmark and how planning and cohesion instruments address the principles of territorial cohesion in these countries (sections 3 and 4). The policy analysis mainly considers the comments that Danish and German public authorities submitted during the consultation process of the EU Green Paper on territorial cohesion and examines national planning reports and operational programmes. Additionally, up to five interviews with representatives of local and regional associations and representatives of relevant ministries were conducted each in Denmark and Germany (here restricted to the federal states of Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Lower Saxony) to critically reflect on the preliminary results of the analysis. The final section summarises the main findings and draws conclusions on whether the concept of territorial cohesion offers added value at all.

## **2. Critical Assessment of the Added Value of Territorial Cohesion at the EU level**

Obviously, territorial cohesion as a normative policy concept can, from an analytical perspective, be framed in manifold ways, including socio-economic convergence, economic competitiveness, spatial planning or policy coherence (Evers et al., 2009; Evers, 2012; see also Waterhout, 2007, 2008). To be able to distinguish these different policy concepts more thoroughly and to ask for the added value of the formal recognition of territorial cohesion at the EU level, each of the analytical per-

spectives is

firstly elaborated on basis of the ‘problem’ to which territorial cohesion is addressed. The second aspect consists of the respective rationales and conceptual ideas related to each understanding of territorial cohesion before the main actors (i.e. the proponents and opponents promoting or rejecting this understanding are presented) (Evers, 2012).

### **Territorial cohesion as socio-economic convergence**

This analytical interpretation of territorial cohesion continues the rationale of traditional cohesion policies in achieving regional or socio-economic convergence. Here, the unevenness of European space and resulting regional disparities are the ‘problems’ calling for cohesion policies to reduce socio-economic and structural disparities between regions to ensure social solidarity and spatial justice among EU member states and regions. This understanding of territorial cohesion is mainly shared by the European Commission, in particular DG Regio, and member states with large disparities between regions (e.g. Italy, Portugal, Spain, Poland) as well as other actors located in lagging regions, such as, among others, the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (Evers et al., 2009, p. 25f.).

Economic and social cohesion policies have, for the first time, explicitly been launched in the European Treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1997) to balance the single market and European integration because ‘the underlying European model, in contrast to purely liberal models in which cohesion is obtained by the social division of labour and the market, assumes that the market alone cannot ensure welfare’ (Peyrony, 2007, p. 70; see also Tewdr-Jones & Mourato, 2005, p. 70; Leonardi, 2006, p. 156).

From a regional perspective, the European Treaties since then emphasise the importance of the (regional) territorial dimension for social and economic cohesion policies (Mancha-Navarro & Garrido-Yserte, 2008, p. 52; Becker, 2009, p. 7). This was even intensified through the introduction of the Economic and Monetary Union, which confirmed the need to have a common EU regional policy when regions with large economic structural differences all belong to one currency area (e.g. Eser, 2005, pp. 259).

When framing territorial cohesion as socio-economic convergence, it has to be summarised that territorial cohesion is not a new objective as ‘the concept was already implicit in the cohesion policy through the system of eligibility, the way financial resources are distributed or the programming is organized. It is a fundamental objective of regional planning in the Union and provides the *raison d’être* for regional development policy’ (Hübner, 2011, p. 6, see also Mancha-Navarro & Garrido-Yserte, 2008, p. 49; Leonardi, 2006, p. 159). However, the territorial-regional focus has been dominated by economic reasons and not by spatial development concerns (Cornett, 2011). This, for example, also becomes apparent in the Fifth Cohesion Report (CEC, 2010a, p. 16) where it is argued that ‘it is [...] essential that the benefits of economic

growth [are] spread to all parts of the Union, including its outermost regions', linking cohesion policy with territorial cohesion. Here, the 'territorial cohesion objective

becomes visible and explicit' (Hübner, 2011, p. 6). Additionally, the EU claims to use cohesion policy and territorial cohesion in particular as a vehicle for economic recovery (Evers, 2012, p. 11).

### **Territorial cohesion as economic competitiveness**

If territorial cohesion is interpreted in this way, the aim is to produce an economically competitive Europe. Here, 'the problem that territorial cohesion is attended to address is increasing global competition' (Evers, 2012, p. 12.; Böhme & Gløersen, 2011, p. 3). In comparison to the first interpretation of territorial cohesion, this means a paradigm shift as investments should be concentrated in those areas that have the highest return with regard to economic competitiveness, such as urban agglomerations, metropolitan areas and highly specialised regions. Territorial cohesion is closely related to policy documents such as the Lisbon Strategy (2000) or Europe 2020 (2010). In this context, cohesion policy thus has to contribute to the fulfilment of the Lisbon targets to create the world's most competitive economic region (ESPON, 2006; see also Mirwaldt et al., 2009, p. 8). Similar priorities can be found in the recently published strategy Europe 2020, which concentrates on:

- Smart growth; developing a knowledge and innovation-based economy that puts emphasis on the quality of education, strengthening of research performance or promoting innovation and knowledge transfer throughout the Union (CEC, 2010b, p. 11);
- Sustainable growth; promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy (CEC, 2010b, p. 14); and
- Inclusive growth; fostering a high employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion by investing in skills, fighting poverty and modernising labour markets, training and social protection systems (CEC, 2010b, p. 17).

With the Lisbon strategy and Europe 2020 as the basis for the interpretation of territorial cohesion as economic competitiveness, it has to be concluded that the 'territorial outcome [...] is far from clear' and that these strategies are 'territorially blind' (Böhme et al., 2011, p. 19; see also Dühr et al., 2010, p. 216). The shift 'to the overt pursuit of economic competitiveness is evident' in EU regional policies (Dühr et al., 2010, p. 217), even if this is not necessarily always in harmony with a policy aiming for regional convergence.

As a consequence, cohesion policy – by incorporating the Lisbon and Europe 2020 objectives – puts the emphasis on 'making regions more competitive by using their endogenous potential in order to realise more cohesion' (Waterhout, 2008, p. 127; see also Böhme & Gløersen, 2011, p.

3; CEC, 2010b, p. 21). The argument is that each region can and should take advantage of its own 'territorial capital' (OECD, 2001). The Barca-Report (2009), by emphasising the principles of territorial diversity, territorial potential and cooperation, calls this a 'place-based approach' towards development that 'would be beneficial to policies directed at either socioeconomic cohesion or competitiveness' (Evers, 2012, p. 15; see also Böhme & Gløersen, 2011, p. 5). The focus on 'territorial capital' finds its further expression in the Fifth Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion (CEC, 2010a), which differs between predominantly rural, intermediate and predominantly urban regions and emphasises the advantage of urban agglomerations and metropolitan regions for creating economic growth. Promoters of this interpretation can mainly be found in economic agglomerations, which are the 'nodes' in a globalised economy (Evers et al., 2009, p. 33) and among member states with strong economies because this may increase their eligibility. Generally, this concerns countries in the northwest of Europe (Waterhout, 2008, p. 110).

### **Territorial cohesion as spatial planning**

In its third analytical interpretation, territorial cohesion has an even more normative perspective, intending to use spatial cohesiveness to solve the challenges of unbalanced territorial development, urbanisation, climate change and the loss of biodiversity by promoting the balanced development of the territory and integrated spatial development as well as protecting valuable natural areas and curbing urban sprawl (Evers, 2012, p. 13; Böhme & Gløersen, 2011, p. 4). Following the Territorial Agenda 2020 of the EU (TA 2020, Article 8), 'it enables equal opportunities for citizens and enterprises, wherever they are located, to make the most of their territorial potentials. Territorial cohesion reinforces the principle of solidarity to promote convergence between the economies of better-off territories and those whose development is lagging behind'.

This view of territorial cohesion is mainly promoted by professional spatial planners or their organisations, such as the European Town and Country Planning Association (ECTP), and northwestern EU member states pursuing comprehensive planning approaches (Waterhout, 2008, pp. 111; Evers et al., 2009, p. 53).

Although the European Community has no formal competence for spatial planning, it becomes apparent that various initiatives since the 1980s have paved the way for pursuing spatial equity or ensuring harmonious, sustainable and balanced spatial development in the EU. In 1983, the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning adopted the European Spatial Planning Charter (e.g. Faludi, 2002, p. 4), identifying the principles and objectives for a European spatial development policy that prevail today. These include balanced social and economic development, improvements in the quality of life of all citizens and the prudent management and protection of nature (Ritter, 2009, p. 179). Following this argumentation, the European Spatial Planning Charter laid the foundation for a European structure

of spatial planning and for the specific needs of territories (urban, rural and frontier areas, mountains, islands, etc.); additionally, it showed the need to organise sectoral policies on a territorial basis (Salez, 2009, p. 2).

The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (CEC, 1999) mainly follows this argumentation. The ESDP was created in order to meet the (territorial) challenges resulting from the Single Market (1992) and to coordinate EU policies with spatial impacts at the European level by pursuing the three spatial development guidelines of (1) polycentric spatial development and stronger urban–rural partnership, (2) parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge and (3) intelligent management of the natural and cultural heritage (CEC, 1999; Faludi & Waterhout, 2002). These territorial priorities can also be found in the Territorial Agenda, which replaced the ESDP in 2007 (TA, 2007), and in its successor, the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020, 2011)<sup>1</sup>.

Even though territorial cohesion – understood as spatial planning – plays only a minor role at the EU level (Evers et al., 2009, p. 53), the Territorial Agenda 2020 puts explicit emphasis on territory and territorial diversity. This interpretation is emphasised by the Territorial Agenda 2020 arguing that ‘the objectives of the EU defined in the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth can only be achieved if the territorial dimension of the strategy is taken into account, as the development opportunities of the different regions vary’ (TA 2020, Article 5; see also CEC, 2008). It is here that the Territorial Agenda 2020 is clearly positioned within the context of the EU 2020 strategy (see above) providing ‘an important political endorsement of place-based and strategic spatial approaches to policymaking’ (Walsh, 2012).

### **Territorial cohesion as policy coordination**

The fourth analytical strand of territorial cohesion can be understood as the horizontal coordination of European policies within a given territory, such as a nation state or region (Evers, 2012, p. 15; see also Böhme & Gløersen, 2011, 7). The ‘problem’ that territorial cohesion is intended to address here is that EU sector policies are not coordinated with each other and might have unintended territorial effects. Even under the European Commission’s Impact Assessment, which has been introduced to provide evidence for political decision-makers on the advantages and disadvantages of possible policy options by assessing their potential impacts (CEC, 2009, p. 4), territorial impacts are often overlooked, as the impact assessments often fail to take into account the spatial dimension systematically (Medeiros, 2013; ESPON, 2013, p. 10). This can result in an ‘unbalanced territorial or spatial distribution of costs and benefits for different types of territories’ (ESPON, 2013, p. 7).

In this context, the concept of territorial cohesion offers the opportunity to assess the territorial impact of EU policies, which has been one of the key drivers to include territorial cohesion as an objective in the Lisbon Treaty (ESPON, 2013, p. 7).

<sup>1</sup> The Territorial Agenda 2020 focuses, among other things, on the fol-

lowing priorities: (1) promoting polycentric and balanced territorial development, (2) encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions, (3) ensuring global competitiveness in regions based on strong local economies and (4) improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises (TA 2020, 2011). ‘Territory’ is used here to integrate EU sectoral policy objectives and instruments and to enhance policy coherence in general. This finds its expression particularly in the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020, Article 43), emphasising that this interpretation might contribute to ‘ensuring the territorial coordination of its interventions; improving the territorial dimension of all steps of strategic programming, evaluation and monitoring activities; ensuring scope for integrated place-based programmes and projects, and integrating different funds in regional strategies’ (TA 2020, Article 46).

This is also summarised by Faludi (2010, p. 12) thus: ‘Territorial cohesion policy concerns the integration of sector policies, taking account of the specificities of the area where they apply. [...] If taken seriously, and although promising to render policy more efficient and effective, such integration curtails the freedom of sector policy makers to do as they please’. This already shows that some policy sectors would ultimately lose some of their autonomy, whereas ‘regional and local authorities seem to have the most to gain as they are those most confronted with the problems of non-coordination on a daily basis’ (Evers, 2012, p. 15). Following Evers (2012, p. 15), one of the proponents of this understanding is the Netherlands, along with Germany (see below), the United Kingdom and Austria. All these countries share the same strategic view that, according their interpretation of territorial cohesion, a given territory is the place where EU policies have to be implemented and coordinated. It is here that an *ex-ante* assessment of territorial impacts might help improve policymaking by reducing the risk of policy failure or by adjusting policies. Additionally, territorial cohesion can then also contribute to better understand the territorial impacts of EU sector policies, to use synergies with other policies and to avoid unintended side effects in other policy areas and on municipalities and regions (TA 2020, Articles 41 and 42; CEC, 2013, p 2; ESPON, 2013, p. 7).

### **Conclusion: Added value of the concept of territorial cohesion?**

To conclude, the addition of territorial cohesion to the Lisbon Treaty as one of the main objectives of the EU besides economic and social cohesion obviously changes the policy rationales underlying the cohesion policies. However, when analysing the added value of territorial cohesion as a policy concept – here referring to changes in policy objectives, altered perceptions of territory and place or modified policy instruments at the European level – the picture is more differentiated. With regard to changes in policy objectives, it can be summarised that the first two aspects of territorial cohesion, namely socio-economic convergence and economic competitiveness, are dominant. The role of spatial planning and policy coordination aspects is less visible at the multilateral level, but of particular importance at the national and regional level as well as

from a cross-border perspective (Cornett, 2011). However, only the two interpretations of territorial cohesion as economic competitiveness and policy coordination seem to offer added value; the other two interpretations – socio-economic convergence and spatial planning – have already played a major role in EU cohesion policies or strategic European spatial development policy before (see above). Additionally, the normative orientation of the concept of territorial cohesion, here understood as spatial planning or policy coordination, also affects the interpretation and implementation of policy objectives.

Even though economic and social issues are still dominant, territory and place are becoming decisive factors in delivering public policies that ‘aim to allow the Union and its regions to fully exploit their endogenous development potential’ (Samecki, 2009, p. 1). Territorial cohesion is seen as the primary EU instrument for mobilising territorial assets and potential and for addressing the territorial impacts generated by European integration, indicating changes in the perception of territory and place. This, for example, finds its expression in the Territorial Agenda of the EU (TA, 2007) and the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (TA 2020, 2011) as well as the Impact Assessment Guidelines (CEC, 2009). However, despite the increasing importance of territorial principles in cohesion policy, ‘territorial cohesion [still] occupies a marginal position in the Community strategic guidelines’ compared with the priority axes relating to competitiveness adopted in the Lisbon Agenda or the Europe 2020 strategy (e.g. Salez, 2009, p. 7).

Changes with regard to policy instruments are not visible in terms of new funding programmes or instruments for areas with geographical disadvantages (e.g. mountainous areas, islands, border areas). However, territorial cohesion allows us to focus on the complexity of economic change from a territorial perspective at the European level as well as the national and regional levels, mainly driven by the policy impact assessment initiatives. Here, territorial cohesion offers the opportunity to assess the territorial impact of EU policies, which presents a new instrumental approach at the European level. It is in this context that territorial cohesion has sharpened the attention on territorial implications of other policies as well as on international cooperation in planning and policy coordination.

The following section discusses how territorial cohesion is understood in detail in Germany and Denmark and how planning and cohesion instruments address the principles of territorial cohesion in these countries. Germany and Denmark have a long tradition of both comprehensive spatial planning policies and interregional equalisation schemes, aiming for equivalent, but not necessarily identical living conditions in each country (e.g. BBSR, 2012, pp. 16; Illeris, 2010; Cornett, 1995). The central element in both countries is the provision of social and health services, infrastructure, education and the opportunity to earn a decent income within a reasonable time distance. In particular, the latter has increasingly become a problem in remote areas facing challenges of industrial restructuring and out-migration. However, when implementing the principles of territorial cohesion, Denmark and Germany pursue dif-

ferent approaches or (spatial) policies.

### **3. Territorial Cohesion from a German Perspective**

When analysing the understanding of territorial cohesion in Germany, it is apparent that it is not seen as complete, but – as, for example, the federal government (BMW, 2009), the Association of German towns and communities (DStGB, 2009), the Association of German counties (DLT 2009) and the Association of German cities and towns (DST, 2009) stated in their comments on the EU Green Paper on territorial cohesion – as an integral part of the concepts of social and economic cohesion.

Even though territorial cohesion is regarded as a mechanism to assess the spatial implications of EU policies and to (spatially) coordinate relevant sector policies (BBSR, 2012, pp. 130), it seems that a reduction in spatial, socio-economic and infrastructural disparities is the main concern when referring to territorial cohesion in Germany (BBSR, 2012, p. 129; DST, 2009, DLT, 2009; BMW, 2009). Territorial cohesion can thus be interpreted as a form of socio-economic convergence (see above). Additionally, a better use of territorial diversity, namely the territorial potential of cities and regions, is considered to be an objective of territorial cohesion (BMVBS, 2012, p. 12; DStGB, 2009; DST, 2009). It has thus been concluded that ‘political strategies, programs and financial instruments should be used to promote balanced territorial development and the development of endogenous potentials’ (BMVBS, 2012, p. 14). Again, this explicitly shows that territorial cohesion is not seen as a new Community support instrument but rather as a policy approach that adds a territorial dimension towards social and economic cohesion and that aims for the spatial integration of sector policies.

The German understanding of territorial cohesion is the result of the well-established fields of (1) spatial planning and (2) regional structural policies. In Germany, both spatial planning and regional structural policies aim to reduce regional disparities and improve regional conditions for economic development (Eckey, 2011, p. 647). By 1972, the federation and federal states together had already introduced a joint scheme for improving regional economic structures (Gemeinschaftsaufgabe Verbesserung der regionalen Wirtschaftsstruktur). Since then, regional structural policies have focused on the proactive utilisation of (endogenous) development opportunities to contribute systematically to the economic development of regions and to avoid regions falling behind (Blotevogel, 2011a, p. 160; Eckey, 2011, p. 654). This means that Germany pursues a mixed strategy approach between convergence, on the one hand, and regional competitiveness and employment, on the other, to prevent or compensate for spatial and economic disparities. Together with fiscal instruments such as fiscal equalisation among states and the solidarity tax, this has ensured and still ensures a reasonably balanced socio-economically developed territory across Germany. Additionally, the joint Federal Government/Länder scheme for improving regional economic structures is based on different territorial categories (territorial diver-

sification) and various eligibility criteria, including investments for the business economy and support infrastructure, investments for tourism and grants for regional development concepts and regional management, which can cover a budget of up to €300,000 (Eckey, 2011, p. 655). It is the aim that regional actors develop their own ideas for the development of their regions and decide on adequate strategies or instruments (Eckey, 2011, p. 656), including new territorial partnerships in terms of urban–rural partnerships (city-regions, etc.) and various ways to include public agencies, economic actors, non-governmental organisations and so on.

This indicates that the joint Federal Government/Länder scheme for improving regional economic structures already has a long and strong tradition of focusing on territorial- based approaches and functional regions, which might help explain why organisations such as the Association of German towns and communities (DStGB, 2009) and the Association of German cities and towns (DST, 2009) argue that regions should receive a regional budget based on a regional strategy or concept to develop individually tailored solutions for their territories instead of introducing new (funding) instruments for geographically less favoured regions.

Funding opportunities for all types of regions are already an integral part of social and economic cohesion policies in a wider sense (e.g. the joint Federal Government/Länder scheme). This also includes a scheme for improving regional economic structures, such as infrastructure projects, regional development concepts and regional management based on the use of endogenous (territorial) potential. From a German point of view, there is no need or justification for a new policy field or for financial transfers at the EU level for geographically less favoured regions. With regard to the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion, here referring to changes in respect to funding instruments or policies that would not happen or would happen differently without the introduction of territorial cohesion, it has to be concluded then that territorial cohesion obviously does not have any greater impacts. In respect to the underlying rationales and conceptual ideas related to territorial development, a similar picture emerges. Territorial cohesion is mainly seen as a concept to reduce disparities, a policy approach that Germany has pursued for almost 40 years. Against this background, the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion is rather low.

Additionally, the German planning system, with its comprehensive integrated approach, systematic and formal hierarchy of plans, has since its establishment in the 1960s aimed at the prevention of or compensation for spatial and economic disparities (e.g. BBSR, 2012, pp. 7). In this context, spatial planning is seen as a public task pursuing the supra- local and interdisciplinary coordination of land use patterns and functions (regulatory function). Through its comprehensive approach and regulatory mechanisms, spatial planning aims for policy coordination, one of the central objectives pursued by territorial cohesion (see above). Therefore, the spatial planning system is built upon vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms (see figure 1). The three planning



levels are interlinked by the mutual feedback principle (or countervailing influence), which means that the goals and principles of national- and state-level spatial planning have to be followed in local government planning, while local or regional needs and planning goals have to be considered when developing a plan at the higher level (vertical coordination) (Pahl-Weber & Henckel, 2008, p. 39).

Similar arrangements exist between comprehensive spatial and land use planning instruments and sector policies with direct or indirect spatial impacts, even though horizontal coordination with sector policies is somewhat difficult to realise in practice (Mäding, 2011, pp. 12; Blotevogel, 2011a, pp. 165).

What can be concluded here in respect to the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion is that no change is recognisable with regard to policy objectives – the territorial coordination of sector policies at different political-administrative levels has been one of the main tasks of the German spatial planning system from its very beginnings. Additionally, it seems that the term ‘Territorial Impact Assessment’ is a direct translation of the German term *Raumverträglichkeitsprüfung*. Germany, besides Austria and Switzerland, has been one of the few countries where a territorial impact assessment is standard practice. There, the spatial impacts of proposed development policies and projects (e.g. railway infrastructure, outlet centres, large-scale retail) have to be assessed by a spatial planning procedure (*Raumordnungsverfahren*) to verify whether these are in line with the aims and objectives of official planning policies (Zonneveld & Waterhout, 2009, pp. 4). In this context and owing to the long tradition of territorial impact assessment in Germany, the added value of territorial cohesion, here understood as policy coordination, is rather low – at least with regard to the change in policy instruments.

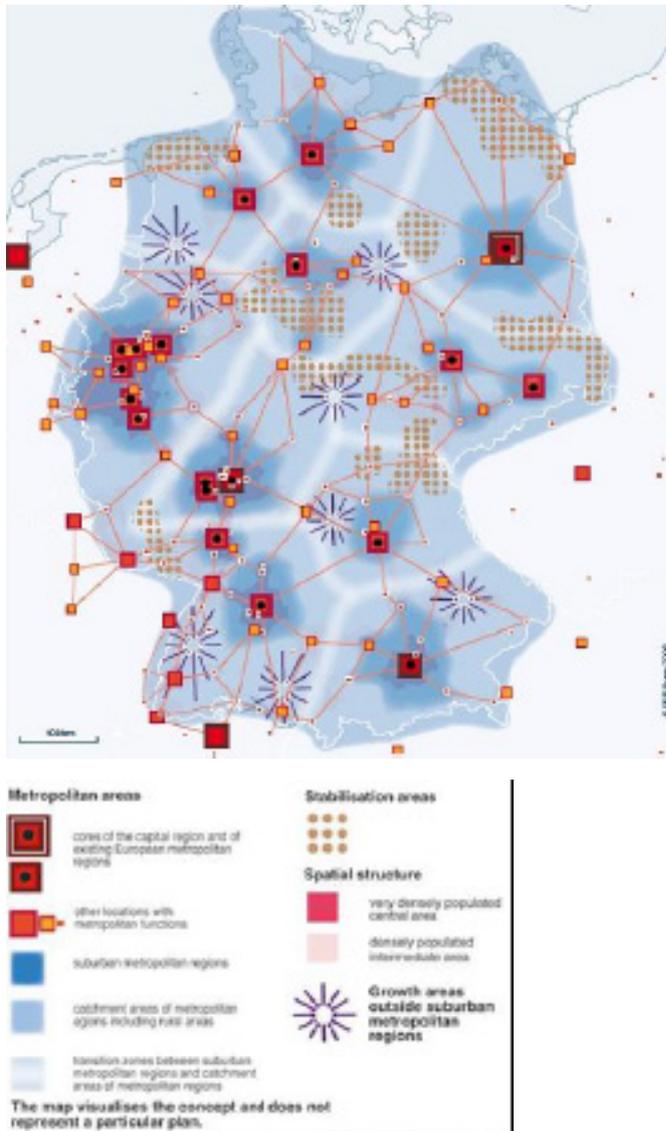
Besides its regulatory function, spatial planning also pursues a com-

**Figure 1:** Vertical and horizontal coordination within the German spatial planning system. (Source: Pahl-Weber & Henckel, 2008, p. 39)

pensatory or balancing function, including the spatially balanced distribution of development opportunities and risks within and among regions (Mäding, 2011, pp. 14). This is not surprising as the formerly broad scope of the German welfare system, including its strong orientation towards social inclusion and egalitarianism (Aiginger & Guger, 2006; Alber, 2006), found its 'spatial expression' in legislation including the Federal Building Act and the Federal Building Code's guiding principles, which have to be taken into consideration at the lower tiers of planning. These principles, among others, aim for (1) sustainable spatial development and (2) equivalent living conditions and the socially equitable utilisation of land for the general good of the community, thereby contributing to a more humane environment (including healthy housing and working conditions, etc.), the provision of basic technical infrastructure for utility services and the protection and development of natural resources. Moreover, they aim for (3) the avoidance of regional and structural imbalances, including unbalanced population structures, and (4) the preservation and development of urban cultural heritage (see also Pahl-Weber & Henckel, 2008, pp. 69). This clearly indicates that territorial policies have been influenced by social objectives since the 1950s.

However, owing to globalisation and Europeanisation, spatial planning has increasingly focused on its (economic) developing function during the past two decades (Mäding, 2011, p. 14; Blotevogel, 2011b, p. 182). It is against this background that spatial planning facilitates economic growth, competitiveness and innovation by placing emphasis on infrastructure planning and the extension of information and communication technologies. The emphasis on the developing function of planning can, for example, be recognised in the introduction of metropolitan regions as a new spatial category at the national level in Germany in 1995. Here, the German federal government and federal states (Länder) agreed on the metropolitan region concept in the Standing Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, which can be understood as the German response to the objective of the ESDP to strengthen the polycentric urban system in Europe (BBSR, 2011, p. 10; Read, 2000, p. 737) and the competitiveness of German cities and regions in the global context (Blotevogel, 2011b, p. 183; Domhardt et al., 2011, p. 228). The idea behind the new spatial category of metropolitan regions was to 'integrate subareas with different structures, i.e. economically strong and weak, rural and urban, peripheral and central subareas, into one development strategy' (BBSR, 2011, p. 22). By bringing together various local municipalities and associations within metropolitan regions, those can develop (bottom-up and self-organised) spatial strategies or implement relevant projects (BBSR, 2011, p. 6).

The introduction of metropolitan regions as a new spatial category in the wake of the ESDP, the Lisbon Strategy and the Territorial Agenda indicates not only a change with regard to the policy objectives but also in respect to the rationales and conceptual ideas related to territorial development. The discussion on territorial cohesion as a concept, here referring to economic competitiveness, has caused changes in the prior-



**Figure 2.** Metropolitan growth areas in Germany (Source: BBSR, 2011, p. 22)

ities of spatial planning towards the (economic) development function and the strengthening of urban agglomerations or metropolitan regions that have the highest return with regard to innovation and employment.

In 2006, the concept of metropolitan regions was complemented by introducing supra- regional partnerships (Großräumige Verantwortungsgemeinschaften), connecting rural areas with urban cores to pursue a balanced (intra-regional) spatial structure (see figure 2; see also BBSR, 2012, pp. 143, pp. 219). Despite focusing on competitiveness, this policy approach recognises the unevenness of the German territory and the need for social solidarity and spatial justice by developing new types of urban–rural partnerships, fostering a new assertiveness of rural areas and considering rural areas as economically and socially vital places. It is widely recognised that cooperation between cities and their surroundings is necessary to retain access to resources such as workforce, research and development, supplying industries, international transport hubs, education and culture. However, the principle of equal living conditions is not generally challenged but rather reinterpreted in terms of ‘approximate’ equal living conditions (e.g. BBSR, 2012, pp.

225; Domhardt et al., 2011, pp. 231). Here, a place-based approach is recognisable as rural areas are integrated into those supra-regional partnerships to contribute systematically to the economic development of regions by using their endogenous development potential. Although the idea is to avoid rural or peripheral areas falling behind, this spatial approach makes use of the terminology introduced by territorial cohesion, here understood as economic competitiveness and spatial planning. It can thus be concluded that some changes in the perception of territory and place are identifiable.

#### **4. Territorial Cohesion in the Danish Context**

The two first predominately economic interpretations of territorial cohesion have been dominant in Denmark in recent decades. Compared with Germany, the spatial agenda has a different nature. Denmark is to a large extent monocentric, and the issue of territorial cohesion therefore typically becomes a question of the distinction between the capital region and intermediate regions and rural areas.

In Denmark, territorial cohesion – at least in policy terms – seems to focus on strengthening economic growth and competitiveness as, for example, the Danish Regions (the interest organisation for the five regions in Denmark) clearly stated in their comment on the EU Green Paper on territorial cohesion (Danish Regions, 2009). At the national level, a pragmatic place-based approach is emphasised, namely that regional territorial diversities should be regarded as regional strengths and opportunities to be exploited. As the respondents indicated, growth and competition have been and still are the leading rationales of Danish regional policies, focusing on a place-based cohesion policy that contributes to a competitive Europe (LGDK, 2009). It has to be recognised in this context that this policy – each region taking advantage of its own territorial capital – was introduced at the national level in 1992, since which it has remained an important part of national spatial and structural policies.

The regional level has been pivotal for regional planning in Denmark since the regional and municipality reform in 1970. Previously, national planning in Denmark was mainly a coordinative effort conducted through White Papers (Landsplanredegørelser) and national planning directives for specific topics. In the process of initiating this framework more than 50 years ago, the crucial institution became the national planning council, and in particular its attached secretariat (see Alsted & Aaes, 1977). From the very beginning, the spatial issue in Denmark was closely related to the dominating position of Metropolitan Copenhagen and the regional development policy (see Illeris, 2010, pp. 14, pp. 94; Galland, 2012). After the creation of the Ministry of the Environment in 1971, spatial planning became the responsibility of this ministry, without changing the principal set-up. Because the municipality reform was followed by a reform of tasks and financial responsibility (opgave og byrdefordelingsreformen), many ministries are now involved in planning relevant issues.

An administrative reform in 2007 fundamentally changed Denmark's



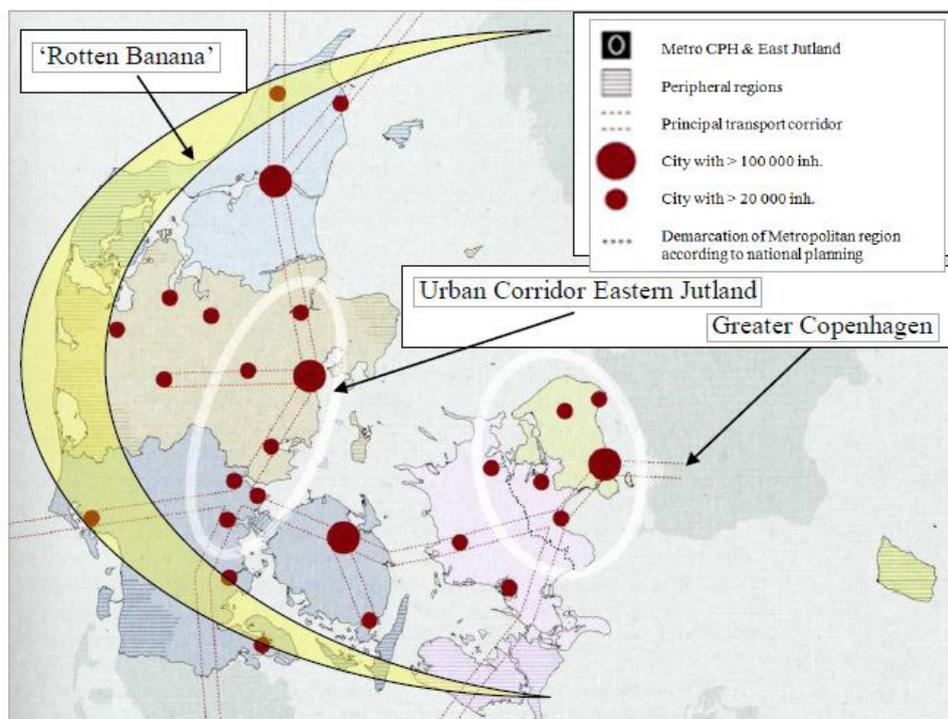
regional administrative structure with a reduction in the number of municipalities and regions to approximately one third of the previous number (now 98 and five, respectively).

However, the multilevel governance structure in planning (see figure 3) shows similarities to the German system illustrated in figure 1. The priorities for territorial cohesion have been rather stable. The most significant change is the focus on regional growth and business development, central components of the first two interpretations of territorial cohesion identified in this article.

Reducing the number of municipalities and regions dramatically has strengthened the tendency to centralise economic activities in municipalities and the most urbanised parts of new regions. This has had some adverse effects in the rural parts of the new enlarged municipalities, in particular in the northern, western and southern periphery, sometimes mentioned as the ‘rotten banana’ (see figure 4), indicating the weak economic situation and demographic forecasts of an aging population and out-migration. Another significant change introduced in the 2007 administrative reform was the focus on regional growth and business development at the regional level, which may be interpreted as territorial cohesion in the sense of economic competitiveness (see above).

Territorial cohesion has become a more prominent issue on the national political agenda since the change of government in 2011, with a dedicated Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Affairs focusing on the implications of the lacking socio-economic convergence in Denmark at large and within the new regions. This may be reinforced by the predominant focus on economic competitiveness. In this context, the influence of traditional spatial planning and policy seems to be rather limited with regard to secure public sector institutions in rural and peripheral parts of the country. As shown in a survey of Danish spatial planning

**Figure 3.** The Danish planning system after the regional and municipality reform in 2007 (Source: Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2006, p. 13)



history and the underlying concepts, pragmatic changes (i.e. restructuring) driven by internal or external needs have been the rule rather than the exception (Galland, 2012).

The underlying rationale of economic competitiveness was confirmed by some Danish respondents proposing that no more than one third of EU regional funds should be used to strengthen less favoured regions; the greater proportion of the funds, they argue, should be available for place-based cohesion policy and for strengthening economic growth and competitiveness. This does not mean that regions with specific geographical features (e.g. mountainous regions, river basins, islands) should receive funding only because of their territorial specificities; in this respect, the concept of territorial cohesion at the European level differs from the (more pragmatic and reactive) Danish place-based cohesion policy.

Nevertheless, the unevenness of Danish regions calls for social solidarity and spatial justice (balanced development) at the national level. In this context, national planning reports (Landsplanredegørelser) have played a prominent role since the 2007 reform, in particular through the statements of national interests in planning (Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2011). In the current planning cycle, the Ministry of the Environment has stated special interests with regard to:

- Urban development in general and the metropolitan region of Copenhagen;
- Infrastructure and the location and development of public utilities;
- Tourism and recreation; and

**Figure 4.** The five Danish regions and two metropolitan regions (Source: Modified map, based on the Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2007, p. 9)

- Use and protection of rural areas (open spaces).

All four areas have a clear reference to maintaining and improving territorial cohesion in the national context. The crucial problem is whether this intention is strong enough to balance or countervail the general focus on growth and competitiveness in other spatial policies. Regional councils have played an important role in this process, since they have to prepare regional spatial development plans as a kind of development vision to integrate the spatial planning and regional business development strategies and thus set the agenda for territorial cohesion in the regions. The municipalities have kept the responsibilities for the integration of spatial and sectoral planning within their (now enlarged) geographical area and the land use management according to zoning laws. This process resulted in six target areas in the National Planning Report, including a European and Nordic dimension (see Table 1). In this context, spatial planning policies in Denmark refer to the principles of socio-economic convergence, indicating a balanced spatial development by making use of territorial capital. The claim for a balanced structure also resulted in the designation of a polycentric metropolitan region on the Danish mainland, including Aarhus as the second biggest city in Denmark (see figure 4). It was confirmed by the interviewees that this metropolitan region was established to strengthen the competitiveness of the Danish mainland; this again follows the interpretation of territorial cohesion aiming for economic growth and competitiveness, which also become visible in the target areas of the National Planning Report. Nevertheless, an increasing consciousness for the regional impacts of sectoral policies is visible, and rudimentary territorial impact assessment schemes have been introduced (see Danish Ministry of the Interior and Health, 2011, pp. 93).

In this process, the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion is

**Table 1:** Target areas in the National Planning Report 2012 (Source: Danish Ministry of the Environment, 2012)

<p>Theme 1: Overall development of the country:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The promotion of growth and how planning can contribute</li> <li>• Balanced development of cities and rural areas</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 2: Climate adaptation and green energy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holistic approach: all relevant policy areas have to contribute</li> <li>• Reduction of emissions and increase in the adaptive ability of the landscape to cope with rain and water in general</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 3: Sustainable cities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing the need for housing, services and businesses</li> <li>• Urban restructuring (i.e. old industrial or harbour areas) and social balance</li> </ul>
<p>Theme 4: Rural areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of development potential</li> <li>• Spatial distribution of services</li> <li>• The small island issue</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 5: Open spaces:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of nature and the rural economy</li> <li>• Tourism and the usage and preservation of nature</li> </ul>	<p>Theme 6: Denmark in a European and Nordic context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening trade and cooperation</li> <li>• New infrastructure (Femern Belt): implications and opportunities</li> </ul>

identified as a conceptual linkage between the all-European cohesion issue and the impact of the national territory. In dealing with the latter, spatial planning and policy coordination aspects become more important, but these are usually handled by the national administration. From this perspective, territorial cohesion may serve as an instrument to strengthen the policy objective, namely to maintain living conditions and a sustainable service level in the rural and peripheral parts of the country. In this context, the perception of territorial cohesion has shifted away from predominantly economic aspects towards broader societal understanding.

## 5. Concluding Remarks and Perspectives

This paper assessed the added value of the concept of territorial cohesion by exploring the difference made by the formal recognition of territorial cohesion – in terms of new or revised policy objectives, altered perceptions of territory and place or modified policy instruments – for EU, national and regional policymaking in practice.

With regard to changes in policy objectives at the European level, it is the interpretation of territorial cohesion as economic competitiveness and, to a lesser extent, policy coordination that offer added value; the other two interpretations – socio-economic convergence and spatial planning – have already played a major role in EU cohesion policies or strategic European spatial development policy. By focusing on the territorial capital of regions and emphasising innovation and employment, territorial cohesion should contribute to economic growth and competitiveness. However, the focus on competitiveness, despite its good intentions, seems to bear the risk that the implementation will strengthen rather than soften the diversity between ‘the centre’ and ‘the periphery’ in Europe. As recent trends in Germany and even in a more homogeneous country such as Denmark indicate, this also includes intra-national disparities by means of new urban–rural divisions caused by demographic change, out-migration and aging, with potential adverse effects on public and private services in rural regions. EU policy will have to cope with increasing disparities and an erosion of the economic base not only in the traditional periphery but also in rural or less urbanised areas close to metropolitan regions (see below).

Additionally, the normative orientation of the concept of territorial cohesion, here understood as policy coordination or spatial planning, also affects the interpretation and implementation of EU policy objectives. In this context, territorial cohesion aims to address the potential, the position and the relative situation of a given geographical entity, thereby ensuring the balanced development of all places and making sure that all citizens are able to make the most of the territorial features in their regions. If territorial cohesion is understood in this way, it changes the policy objectives as it aims for ‘equivalent’ rather than ‘equal’ living conditions across the regions in Europe.

When looking at the policy objectives in Denmark and other Nordic countries (e.g. Finland), the interpretation of territorial cohesion as eco-

conomic competitiveness, including the use of territorial capital, is hardly new. Indeed, Denmark has pursued such a strategy since the early 1990s (see also EPRC, 2010, pp. 103). However, in Germany, the focus on competitiveness has been intensified by introducing metropolitan regions. Here, the aim is to facilitate economic growth, competitiveness and innovation by placing emphasis on infrastructure planning and the extension of information and communication technologies in metropolitan regions. However, at the same time, it becomes obvious that the metropolitan regions in Germany recognise the unevenness of the German territory and the need for social solidarity and spatial justice by developing new types of urban–rural partnerships, fostering a new assertiveness in rural areas and considering rural areas as economically and socially vital places. A similar discussion started in Denmark only recently, too. Nevertheless, the concept of territorial cohesion, here understood in terms of economic competitiveness and spatial planning, seems to offer added value for rethinking current (spatial) policies in EU member states that do not have such a long tradition and established system of spatial development policies. Szlachta and Zaucha (2010, p. 12), for example, conclude that the Polish National Spatial Development Concept should consider the endogenous potential of Poland’s territory in the future and ensure the networking of metropolitan areas facilitated by multimodal transport infrastructure links to become more competitive. Additionally, the strengthening of urban–rural links seems to be of great importance for spatial development policies, for example, in the Czech Republic (Wokoun et al., 2010, pp. 1891) so that territorial cohesion adds value with regard to policy objectives.

Changes with regard to policy instruments are not visible in terms of new funding programmes or tools for areas with certain geographical features (e.g. mountainous regions, islands, river basins, border areas) at the European level. At the national scale, such countries as Denmark and Germany are (also) sceptical with regard to the introduction of new funding priorities and instruments; the old ones obviously work sufficiently as convergence among regions could be achieved from a country-by-country perspective. As the German position has particularly shown, instruments for social and economic cohesion already cover territorial aspects successfully.

Additionally, neither Denmark nor Germany regard territorial cohesion as a new concept and deny a new policy field or financial basis at the EU level for regions with specific geographical features. In this context, territorial cohesion would only be ‘old wine in new bottles’ (Faludi, 2004) as the principles of the ESDP or Territorial Agenda of the EU (TA, 2007) and the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (TA 2020, 2011), namely the polycentric, balanced and sustainable development of the EU territory, should already be recognised in cohesion policies. However, for EU member states that have not been involved in the ESDP process or that do not have such a long tradition and established system of spatial development policies, the concept of territorial cohesion might offer added value. Referring to the Polish National Spatial Development Concept again, Szlachta and Zaucha (2010, p. 12) request

that its operational part should ‘apply regional policy instruments or, at least, specify spatial issues, which need to be solved by means of those instruments’. From their point of view, emphasis should particularly be placed on spatial and regional policy support for urban centres outside the metropolitan regions as well as for rural areas, which highlights the need to have (national) policy instruments for regions with specific geographical features.

However, even more important with regard to the policy instruments offered by territorial cohesion is the opportunity to assess the territorial impact of sector policies at both the European and the national or regional levels. Integrating and coordinating sector policies or fragmented public spending programmes and applying the territorial dimension within all programmes at the national or regional level is a new policy tool for many EU member states (e.g. Medeiros, 2013; Wokoun et al., 2010). This offers added value, even though some EU member states such as Germany and Austria already use these principles as part of their spatial planning systems.

With regard to changes in the perception of territory and place, it can be concluded that territorial issues have been re-launched in the public debate regardless of the fact that territorial cohesion still occupies a marginal position in the Community’s strategic guidelines compared with the priority axes relating to competitiveness adopted in the Lisbon Agenda or the Europe 2020 strategy. Territorial cohesion is seen as the primary EU instrument for mobilising territorial assets and potential and enhancing economic competitiveness; at the same time, it addresses the territorial impacts generated by European integration. This, for example, finds its expression in the Territorial Agenda of the EU (TA, 2007) and the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (TA 2020, 2011). At the national level, the mobilisation of territorial assets is one of the major concerns as indicated by the (re-)introduction of metropolitan regions as a spatial category in, for example, Germany and Denmark as well as in other countries such as Poland and Portugal (Szlachta & Zaucha, 2010; Medeiros, 2013). The growing attention paid towards spatial and territorial issues within countries coincides with the increased awareness of international spatial interdependence, most prominently manifested in the creation and development of the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON) and the Territorial Cohesion priority of the EU.

Additionally, in EU member states that do not have a comprehensive planning system or a long tradition of an established system of spatial development policies, territorial cohesion places emphasis on comprehensive territorial approaches. Following Medeiros (2013, p. 14), cohesion policy in Portugal is mainly based on socio-economic development perspectives, but misses a more holistic and territorial approach. According to the author, the better knowledge of the territorial assets and potential of the regions is central to assess which development approaches might work in different kinds of regions (Medeiros, 2013, p. 22). Similar arguments, which can be traced back to the rhetoric of the concept of territorial cohesion, can also be found in other EU member

states (Wokoun et al., 2010; Szlachta & Zaucha, 2010).

From this perspective, the concept of territorial cohesion has sharpened the attention on the territorial implications of European policies from a broader perspective, and it thus may serve as a conceptual tool to deal with these issues, not only from an economic but also from a planning and policy coordination perspective.

## Endnotes

- 1 The complete list of these facilities, services and economic activities is mentioned in section 4.
- 2 It has been decided to omit Luxembourg City because its values are largely superior to all the other municipalities. Including this city would have strongly lowered the values of the other cities and would have hindered a good analysis of urban hierarchy.
- 3 It must be emphasised that, based on data availability, only the facilities, services and businesses located within the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg have been taken into account, even if some municipalities can be polarised by urban centres situated abroad, (like Trier, in Germany).

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