

Preamble

This paper tries to point out practical as well as conceptual open questions about the topic of Territorial Cohesion (TC). It focuses on practical problems met by the author in his daily work as town and regional planner, often carried out in EU convergence territories (ex. Ob. 1). It acknowledges the scientific statements developed by EU institutions in recent years as a frame of the picture representing the policies and instruments for Territorial Cooperation and Cohesion. In other words, the article is about “operational considerations” aiming at stimulating new attentions on how to make the debate on TC more practical than a thoughtfully considered essay providing a detailed storyline on the topic and its past and future transformations.⁵⁷

These consideration address three critical points:

- 1) the difficulty of fully involving the local administrative levels in new and innovative opportunities for TC
- 2) a fluctuating “Europeanisation” in the realm of territorial cooperation (especially related to the urban dimension),
- 3) the uncertain perspectives on how to design effective and efficient future urban policies for 2014-2020, both at central and local level.

Territorial cohesion as a dynamic, evolving, but “locally rooted” concept...

In December 2011 I attended a conference on Territorial Cohesion. The precise topic of the conference focused on the links among territorial cohesion, the competitiveness and the new EU2020 Strategy (it is likely that such conferences are going to be carried out everywhere in Europe).

⁵⁷ Recent literature on territorial cohesion focuses mainly on its background and various aspects of the concept's introduction in the EU policy discourse. Janin Rivolin (2010) offers a compilation of relevant official texts and Faludi (2010) endeavours to clarify how Cohesion policy relates to the debate on European spatial planning, also covered by Dühr, Colomb and Nadin (2010). (Faludi, Peyrony, 2011)

One of the conference guests (an academic) put a request to the representative of the Ministry (a person having a very important role): can you provide us with a precise and unique definition of “Territorial Cohesion”? The representative of the Ministry immediately answered back: you will find a precise definition of what territorial cohesion is in the conference proceedings!

As a town planner involved in the use and promotion of EU designed tools for territorial management and development, I was terrified by such an absurd dialogue, but it gives a good idea about the state of the art regarding this topic.

This anecdote is to emphasise how distant the conceptual thinking of researchers and policy makers is from the reality of “making” territorial cohesion, and applying integrated territorial and urban approaches “in the field”.

Territorial Cohesion for many practitioners, researchers, city managers and politicians is still something insubstantial and slippery, but they have a need to package this concept. From the Urban pilot projects (1995), to the Urban I and II experiences (from 1994 to 2006), considering the ESDP (1999), until the Leipzig Charter (2007), taking into account the Green paper on Territorial Cohesion (2008) and concluding with the last Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (2011), we can notice that the Europeanisation of regional and urban policy still remains actual. The question remains whether the Europeanisation of territorial policies has bred into a precise relationship between territories (cities, towns, metropolitan areas, regions), (elected/functional) needs, and EU promoted urban policies⁵⁸. There seem to be some major and minor mismatches in this process of Europeanisation of Urban Policies.

⁵⁸ We all know that the EU is not responsible for urban policies, but we even know as it has been one of the major protagonist in proposing innovative tools for urban renewal/regeneration (especially in the second half of the 90's).

I see three main categories of still open questions, which are containing and raising many other related and inter-connected problems:

1. In the current programming period EU investments into territorial cooperation (where it is possible to experiment with real integration) are minor when compared with those directed to competitiveness and convergence objectives (2,5 % of total investment operated through structural funds)⁵⁹

2. The EU continues to lack competence for urban policies⁶⁰.

3. Even if it is clearly stated that sustainable town planning is rooted locally (it is always worth to remember the fundamental and effective RIO 92 slogan “think global act local”)⁶¹, national ministries or powerful regions tend to retain control over what could happen/ is happening in cities (this last point raises basic questions about the enforcement of the subsidiarity principle in the EU)⁶².

The unstable condition of EU promoted urban policies/initiatives creates continuous doubts about what territorial cohesion should mean in practical terms for cities. This generates confusion and pushes people to ask for a precise definition. However, to formalise the concept of territorial cohesion into a set of allowed or prohibited initiatives is not the way to let this concept evolve.

If we accept that a sustainable development is locally rooted and based on needs, requests, ideas, initiatives of local communities, then there is a risk to confound the Community at state level with local communities. The cohesive “glue”, without posing any risks to the sovereignty of nation states and regions⁶³, could be found in a set of shared and well-designed urban tool, EU promoted and locally implemented. It seems that the next programming period (2014-2020) is taking this path, and above all is preparing the ground for really implementing integrated approaches.

Instead of looking for a static definition of territorial cohesion, we have to think how to connect better the dynamics of local levels (towns, cities,

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[...] the greatest investment ever made by the EU through cohesion instruments will be worth € 308 billion (in 2004 prices) to support regional growth agendas and to stimulate job creation. 82% of the total amount will be concentrated on the “Convergence” objective, under which the poorest Member States and regions are eligible. In the remaining regions, about 16% of the Structural Funds will be concentrated to support innovation, sustainable development, better accessibility and training projects under the “Regional Competitiveness and Employment” objective. Another 2.5% finally are available for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation under the “European Territorial Cooperation” objective[...]. Inforegio - http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/newregl0713_en.htm

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The precise status of urban policy in the EU [...] has always reflected the balance of forces inside and outside the Commission between those who want to promote the urban agenda and those concerned to limit its significance. The essential story of urban policy in the EU is one of a gradual increased recognition of the importance of cities – but always under the umbrella of regional policy. There have been key moments when the issue was pushed up the agenda – for example with the creation of the URBAN Community initiative in 1994 or the Urban Forum in 1998. But periods of advance have often been followed by periods of retrenchment - if not retreat. (Parkinson, M., 2005).

metropolitan areas, inter-communal systems...). Of course, in a specific territorial case this dynamic is very slow and needs to be triggered by external, supra-local inputs to progress the definition/evolution of the concept of territorial cohesion. Territorial cohesion does not consist of a well written sentence with clear bullet points, but it may be a set of methodologies for local and regional development, a set of development tools and specific urban policies (policies for regeneration, development, renewal, rehabilitation, culture, social inclusion). The toolbox for territorial cohesion is still too empty, especially at the urban scale.

The process of Europeanisation of urban and regional policies, with its mismatches, could still be summarised as follows:

- Europeanisation enriches and transforms the institutions (at all administrative levels) and makes their governance frameworks more complex;
- Europeanisation changes politics, policies and behaviours of single member states.⁶⁴

The governance questions of town planning can be enriched by a supra-national actor. At least this would provide a viewpoint (trans-national, or relatively neutral) that can open other perspectives and add further financing for urban questions. What is relevant though is to enable cities to access funds for TC directly from the EU, that is permitting a direct dialogue between cities and a central, but composite, heterogeneous, multi-culturally generated polity.

Why did the EU stop the Community Initiatives orientated to cities? The fact of blocking such Community initiatives has been a bad sign of how some forces push to fragment the political and cultural construction of the European Union based on bottom-up experiences linked to real examples of community development. The evaluation of the urban experience was not bad at all. However, thinking about a Europe of cities, or a Europe where even small and medium sized cities could account for more is still

⁶¹ The original phrase "Think global, act local" has been attributed to Scots town planner and social activist Patrick Geddes. Although the exact phrase does not appear in Geddes' 1915 book "Cities in Evolution," the idea (as applied to city planning) is clearly evident: "Local character" is thus no mere accidental old-world quaintness, as its mimics think and say. It is attained only in course of adequate grasp and treatment of the whole environment, and in active sympathy with the essential and characteristic life of the place concerned. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_globally,_act_locally#cite_note-2)

124 ⁶² The subsidiarity principle is one of the central principles in the EU context, laying down that political decisions in the EU must always be taken at the lowest possible administrative and political level, and as close to the citizens as possible.

⁶³ It is worth remembering that many regions, especially in newest member states, in EU are functional and not elected powers...these open many questions on their rights to make decisions on relevant financial investments, as they are not expression of local communities living in their territories, but a sort of operational branches of the central states.

⁶⁴ This concept of Europeanisation of urban policies is faced in the previous EUSS book: Urban Change. See "Eu Urban Tools and Regeneration" (Elisei, P, pag.39).

likely to be too advanced a concept for the current political way of thinking and making Europe.

The ex-post evaluation of the Urban I CI (GHK, 2003) has shown that URBAN I was a success, both in terms of the substantive impact of the interventions and in terms of the delivery mechanisms adopted: *“The Urban Programme contributed to improving the quality of life in the target areas, and also had a lasting impact on structures at the local and city level, which have been sustained to deliver urban policy beyond the life of the programme.”*

“The area based approach to tackling urban problems has been an essential ingredient of the success of URBAN II. It is unlikely to have been as successful if the funding had been allocated and run as a regional programme. This is because the ‘essence’ of URBAN II has been the ‘bottom up’ approach where, in the best examples, a wide range of public, private and community sector partners have been energised around a set of locally owned challenges and solutions (EC, ECOTEC 2010).”

The rhetoric of cities like engines of growth and sustainable development (and currently even of sustainable growth) would be more operational and less abstract if the EU had continued to provide an easily identifiable line of policies like the ‘Urban Initiatives’ which could cope with the capability of being local instruments (cities proposing places and issues to solve) while giving concrete guidelines valid at EU scale (the EU providing a method based on lessons learned from best practices instead of nation states or development agencies, as many of these institutional actors do not know what is good for town planning).

Territorial cohesion and the economic crisis: is a real integrated territorial approach the solution?

The financial and economic crisis, a daily leitmotiv of the last years, is

confounding again the “magic” words in the dictionary of ‘town planning’ and ‘regional development’. The last key documents issued by the EU/EC on territorial cohesion put again a very old-fashioned and evergreen word – growth - into the centre of the arena! The moral obligation to continue paying pensions, to support public spending (health, transport, education, justice, culture ...), to maintain a decent level of welfare has encouraged politicians and economists to oil the mechanisms that run the growth society.

This is a first important consideration to reassess: Why do we inspire our strategic policies, in a period of vulnerability, by just expecting the come back of an imaginative golden age of growth? Clearly, the return to the use of the term growth, in the middle of the post-modern, or, perhaps more likely, the late-modern times, has a romantic and nostalgic flavour. Of course the revival of this term raises some doubts about the ability of EU decision makers and policy designers to innovate, and raises the question: are there no alternative concepts that would dispense of the use of such an indigestible oxymoron as “Sustainable Growth”?

It was, and still is very difficult to construct a meaning for the ‘sustainable development’ concept, and to derive appropriate operational tools to implement it, considering that it is not free from internal inconsistencies and constrictions of connotations. Asking urban and regional planners to develop tools for ‘sustainable growth’ seems to be really a mission impossible! However, the task has become definitively more difficult, because, considering the EU2020 strategy requirements, growth must now be even “inclusive” and “smart”.

Those who take care of the city and, more generally, the development of territories, know how unsustainable it is to keep pushing on the accelerator of consumption and investment just for the quantitative benefit of GDP. Yet, unfortunately, that seems to remain the only esteemed and respected welfare indicator.

As regards these last considerations, interesting argumentations are appearing in documents which are preparing the ground for the next programming period, specifically when considering the idea of proposing place based policies. “A *place-based policy* is a long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places” (Barca, F., 2009)⁶⁵. It is still not well known how the new regulations will be set up, but we can already notice from the first published documents that territory matters and, above all, that it is important to define methodologies for integrating funds, policies and strategies. Thus, planners should continue to work on defining feasible instruments necessary to put into practice the concept of “integrated territorial approach”. One interesting proposal is coming from the Committee of the Regions. It proposes a revival of the Territorial Pacts, providing this definition: “A Territorial Pact for Europe 2020 is an agreement between a country’s tiers of government (local, regional, national)”. Parties signing up to a Territorial Pact commit to coordinate and synchronise their policy agendas in order to focus their actions and financial resources on the Europe 2020 Strategy goals and targets. The evident added value is the facilitation triggered by the pacts to realise a proper integration (vertical, horizontal, conceptual, relational, functional) at territorial scale: to link a specific area to a precise pact, to an explicit partnership, to a clear development idea (leading concept for development: a development driver). Integration seems to be, moreover, the very strong point of the new programming period (2014-2020), changing the concept of 2007-2013 mono-funds (that was not helpful at all for urban and regional development issues, especially the mainstreaming of structural funds for urban regeneration).

Recent proposals of the European Commission stated in the Common Provisions Regulation foresee diverse mechanisms to encourage integrated approaches⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ It is important remembering, in the context of this article, that Fabrizio Barca, currently Ministry for Territorial Cohesion in Italy, has been one of the protagonists of the conceptual elaborations generated in the CNEL (Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e del Lavoro) during the 90’s.[regulation/newreg/0713_en.htm](http://www.regulation/newreg/0713_en.htm)

⁶⁶ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT, Elements for a Common Strategic Framework 2014 to 2020 for the European Regional Development Fund the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (2012). Mechanism’s description is taken from this working document.

Mechanisms to facilitate the development of local and sub-regional approaches:

1. *Community-led local development*: Community-led local development (based on the experience of LEADER under rural development) can complement and enhance the delivery of public policies for all CSF Funds. It aims at increasing effectiveness and efficiency of territorial development strategies by delegating decision-making and implementation to a local partnership of public, private and civil society actors. Community-led local development should be implemented in the context of a strategic approach followed by public policy-makers, to ensure that the 'bottom-up' definition of local needs takes account of priorities set at a higher level.

2. *Integrated territorial investments for the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund*: An Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) is an instrument which provides for integrated delivery arrangements for investments under more than one priority axis of one or more operational programmes. Funding from several priority axes and programmes can be bundled into an integrated investment strategy for a certain territory or functional area. This can take the form of an integrated strategy for urban development, but also for inter-municipal cooperation in specific territories.

Mechanisms to encourage the development of integrated operations:

1. *Integrated Operations*: Unlike the current period, an operation may receive support from one or more CSF Funds and from other Union instruments.

2. *Joint Action Plans*: A Joint Action Plan is a new type of integrated operation implemented through a result based approach in order to achieve specific objectives jointly agreed between the Member States and the Commission.

Community-led local development and ITI are definitively very interesting innovations of the new programming period, as they move funds to local level management and partnerships. They could work if local administrations would be capable to insert them into local strategic development frameworks (e.g. Strategic Urban Agendas, Strategic Plans).

Further considerations

- 2) a fluctuating “Europeanisation” in the realm of territorial cooperation;
- 3) the uncertain perspectives on how to design effective and efficient future urban policies in 2014-2020, both at central and local level.

In considering the involvement of cities in territorial cohesion issues, Nation States should start to realise that urban sustainable development is something rooted at local scale. Central powers (especially states, but even powerful regions) must intervene by helping with tools (the richer the family of tools the better for local development) instead of ruling through command and control planning systems. Here is the “change of mentality” to bring into many EU Member States and regions: trust the local levels and explore with them innovative urban policies. The current programming period (2007-2013) has definitively pensioned off the Urban Initiatives and is proposing to mainstream the investment for cities into the Operational Programmes. This choice, is not bad or good per se, but definitively does not create cohesion in Europe. Indeed it increases the development gap between most advanced and less developed Member States. In fact, Member States having an advanced and organised territorial governance system (both vertical and horizontal) can benefit from this mainstreaming, as they possess the policy frameworks capable to canalise the EU funds effectively into suitable places (cities, neighbourhoods...) with appropriate methodologies (strategic plans, territorial agendas and

local urban policies). Other Member States, especially the recent post-socialist ones, do not have either a relevant planning tradition in designing urban tools (on the contrary, they have old-fashioned planning systems) or a developed governance framework (this is even the case for several Mediterranean Regions) to manage the mainstreaming of the structural funds. In other words, who is already organised can drive the use of the funds more easily into an already working systems. Those who do not own an adequate toolbox for urban planning will not have the possibility to learn how to structure effective and efficient urban policies. The Urban initiatives have been not just tools for specific policies, but even lessons for less advanced urban reality on how to create integration, how to give sense to the concept of integrated territorial approach. They have been a school of policy design for the less advanced urban planning systems and even for weak regional governance frameworks. In other words, they have been a way to bring Europeanisation at the decisional level that is closer to citizens. Consequently, if we involve cities we look for a strong Europeanisation; conversely, if we keep decision at a central level, we move to a weak Europeanisation.

Integrated and complex urban policies based on multi-actor partnerships are the way to solve major urban questions. It is essential to have the possibility to use and integrate financial means coming from different sources in a flexible way. If the regulation of future structural funds linked to the CSF (Common Strategic Framework) will maintain the current premises, Partnership Contracts will be adopted which will start the commitments of the partners at national and regional level. These contracts will be linked to the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the National Reform Programmes. They will set forth “an integrated approach for territorial development supported by all CSF Funds”⁶⁷. This is definitively good evidence for the possibility of designing a good approach to urban development and regeneration in the next programming period.

It is up to member states to create a clever framework for implementing the potential implicit in these “innovations” in the use of EU funds. What is important is to explore now how to combine this “new” interesting trend with urban needs.

Finally, if territory matters, if partnerships matter, if long term perspectives matter we, as planners, should not re-create situations, in the next programming period, that permit to let money flow into the cities to resolve urban issues (regeneration, requalification, development, housing, infrastructures) without having beforehand a strategic plan and framework that justify the coherence, sustainability, resilience, the “urban sense” of what that money is going to finance. It is necessary to start to mediate the financial/economic requests with real urban/territorial needs and potentialities. Only thus will these interventions “generate” territorial cohesion.

Case studies reported in this box are based on author’s experience on use of structural funds (mainly ERDF) in Romania (member state from 2007). Romania is among the poorest European states and present serious territorial and urban problems. The following case studies introduce three key topics not sufficiently faced by the policies put in place in the current programming period: a) presence of slums, not just inhabited by Roma in the periphery of major Romanian cities (urban poverty), b) difficulties of using funds in the context of shared and well-designed processes of strategic planning (scarce planning tools) , c) problems to face in regenerating and re-designing the public spaces/the buildings and the civic fabric of densely inhabited neighbourhoods built in the years of socialism (social polarisation and exclusion). The Romanian case demonstrates - but this is not completely new - that when a soft policy approach meets a weak planning systems (territorial governance system), the results are not so brilliant. Local politicians and civil servants completely changed the

rules of the game in the own favour, the EU counterpart accepted it: just the rapidity of disbursement is important. The EU permissive and weak input in the Romanian axis 1 has permitted the local administrator to disavow many of the town planning principles that have made the EU, in the last 20/25 years one of the most interesting actors in the design and proposition of urban policies. The lesson that is possible to learn from these town planning practices is that, when the EU approach becomes too soft in this field, we don't have anymore a bi-directional interaction, but a mono-directional management of ERDF funds operated by the member state and a strong re-distributive investment of public money, with scarce effects on citizens' quality of life: this is not a proper Europeanisation of urban policies and tools .

CASE A: The EU Phare Project Strengthening Capacity and Partnership Building to improve the Roma condition and Perception, RO 2004/016-772.01.01.01 (2006-2008) aimed to support the implementation of the National Strategy to Improve Conditions for Roma through training and institution building, research and through a public affairs campaign. One key task of the project was the involvement of Roma communities in the process of urban regeneration financed by the POR Axis 1.





CONCLUSION: though the Romanian ROP Axis 1 (fostering sustainable urban development) had at its disposal a consistent amount of funds for 'social infrastructures' (25% of around 1,4 bl. Euros), the areas reported in these pictures above ⁶⁸ have not been considered in the financed projects. All the preparation work done in the context of the Phare project, together with many municipalities has not been taken into the axis 1: actually, there is no initiative of proper urban regeneration financed through the ERDF. All funds have been directed towards infrastructure, as unfortunately the equation "development=investment in infrastructure" sounds well to many politicians and even technicians: reasons of that are well known to the readers.

CASE B: It is interesting to see how many Romanian cities, especially the small and medium sized ones, are changing their way of managing their urban issues and start to use the instruments of strategic planning. The case of Baia Mare is a significant one (the author of this article has been the project designer of BM strategic plan and of its Poster Plan ⁶⁹). It was possible in this city, that for many aspect it remains a workshop of urban experimentations (thanks to a restricted number of open minded administrators), to create "planning benchmarks" to use it as conceptual background for giving priority to local projects, but, above all, as context to access many other EU projects (URBACT, SEE, INTERREG, SMART CITIES and so on).

⁶⁸ The pictures here represented have been taken by the authors in different Romanian Cities classified as development poles.

⁶⁹ The drawings here reported are taken by the Poster Plan, it is a documents created as a graphical vademecum of the strategic plan principles.

CONCLUSIONS: Cities that invest in planning have a feedback in terms of new initiated projects (at least the EU financed ones).The main problem faced by this plan is that the local resources are extremely limited and it is difficult, in the Romanian context, to launch PPP (Public Private Partnerships), or other forms of project financing to support the identified solutions. This happens for different reasons (political, administrative, cultural, financial...), but above all it lacks, at the level of the Romanian planning set of tools for urban development, the possibility of managing such procedure in the context of clearly ruled frameworks, in other words there are no instruments where to rest the constructions of complex urban development projects. If this last consideration is united to the existence of a weak and obsolete planning system, it is easy to understand how strategic plans result in good exercises of planning that in a way provide conceptual backgrounds for the political discussion (especially the poster plan); under another perspective, they are used by the city administrators as a captivating post card opening the way to the EU initiatives/financing, as a precious and organised synthesis of major urban issues to face... Unfortunately many of them continue to be unsolved.

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