

# From Smart Growth to European Spatial Planning: a new paradigm for EU Cohesion Policy post-2020

EDUARDO MEDEIROS

Centro de Estudos Geográficos (CEG) – Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning (IGOT) -  
Edifício do IGOT - Rua Branca Edmée Marques, 1600-276 Lisboa, Portugal  
Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal – Email: [emedeiros@campus.ul.pt](mailto:emedeiros@campus.ul.pt)

---

---

## Abstract:

Formally initiated in 1989, EU Cohesion Policy as since passed throughout a series of metamorphoses, along its five programming periods, while becoming the most financing EU policy. As its name indicates, its initial goals were earmarked for promoting economic cohesion and social cohesion, following the intentions expressed in the Single European Act. Since then, from a policy strategy intervention point of view, EU Cohesion Policy has shifted into a financial tool to promoting investment for growth and jobs. In the meantime, European Spatial Planning, which had its debating pinnacle with the release of the European Spatial Development Perspective, by 1999, has declined in interest and narrowed into a novel notion of Territorial Cohesion. This French notion was finally included into the EU treaty by 2010. Looking back at the implementation process of EU Cohesion Policy and its main impacts, available literature identify a myriad of positive and less-positive aspects. Moreover, these impacts varied within all EU Member States, creating a dual faction: pro and against it. Faced with mounting dilemmas, following from the recent (2016) Brexit process, together with a long-term economic stagnation in Europe and raising euro scepticism, EU Cohesion Policy post-2020 is striving for its survival. Drawing on this critical scenario, EU Cohesion Policy faces several potential paths, from a pure extinction into a soft makeup process. In this challenging context, this article analyses the implementation and main impacts of EU Cohesion Policy and proposes a new strategic paradigm, built around a novel ‘European Spatial Planning’ vision, built around the main pillars and dimensions of territorial development and cohesion. More particularly, we suggest that the current rationale for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, could instead fuel an alternative strategic design based on a cohesive and sustainable development vision: green economy, balanced territory, good governance, and social cohesion. In general, many of the positive achievements from the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy (territorial cooperation, social inclusion, environmental protection, transport connectivity, research and development, cities renovation) would remain intact. However, the proposed novel strategic paradigm provides a radical shift in placing the European and Transnational level at the centre of policy design and implementation, by prioritizing large-scale and large-impact trans-European projects, notably by financing renewable forms of energy, trans-European sustainable transport networks, and large-scale renovation and modernization of urban areas.

Keywords: EU Cohesion Policy, Territorial Cohesion, European Spatial Planning, Territorial Cooperation, Territorial Development

## 1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) Regional Policy, also known as EU Cohesion Policy (ECP), is presently the EU's main investment policy, as highlighted in its official website<sup>i</sup>. Moreover, its importance for the EU's overall political agenda goes beyond the mere financial allocation aspects, as its holistic policy thematic character and sectoral scope makes it a perfect 'tool' to foment territorial development and cohesion processes, in view of the goals expressed in the EU Treaty: promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States (article 3).

In the same way, directly or indirectly, ECP has been positively impacting spatial planning instruments at all territorial levels (urban, local, regional, national, transnational). These impacts are not only seen in the creation of new spatial planning policy instruments and regulations/legislation, within EU Member States, as 'mandatory regulative tools' to access available EU funding, but also as fundamental 'policy strategic design tools' for increasing place-based, integrated, and more efficient policy implementation processes, for instance in the ECP Regional Operational Programmes.

Indeed, despite the fact that European Spatial Planning (ESP) is not a formal competence of the EU (see Faludi, 2006; Ferrão, 2003, 2010), that does not necessarily translates into its effective influence on the patterns of the EU's territorial development, and also on the implementation of some EU sectoral policies. Clearly, as Dühr *et al.* (2010:xix) remember "it is undeniable that the EU has become an important actor for influencing spatial planning decisions and shaping the spatial development of the European territory".

Such a claim, becomes mostly evident when reading the expressed goals of national and regional spatial planning policies which, in several cases, tend to follow goals expressed in ESP '*agenda setting*' documents, like the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP - EC, 1999), and the two Territorial Agendas (Territorial Agenda 2007, 2011). This is, for instance, evident, in the incorporation of the EU goal of achieving polycentric development as a counterpoint to existing concentration in the 'Blue Banana' (see Faludi, 2014), and a more sustainable and cohesive development, into the national and regional spatial plans (see Medeiros, 2014c).

In this context, this article discusses the potential positive effects in placing ESP at the heart of ECP strategic goals, guidelines and principles, to fuel the clamour for a cohesive and development post-

2020 EU policy paradigm, rather than the present (2014-2020) narrowed vision of 'growth'. As such, along the following lines, we propose to answer the following guiding research question: How can European Spatial Planning Strategies act as a catalyst to implement a post-2020 ECP paradigm for territorial development and cohesion?

By embracing on two widely discussed topics on available academic literature (ECP and ESP) this article aims at contributing mostly to highlight the potential gains for promoting European Territorial Development and Cohesion, in relating both in a more strategic and profound manner. For that, the paper is organised in three different sections and a conclusion. The next section briefly discusses the evolution of the ECP strategic visions and their adaptations to specific socioeconomic and political contexts, while critically debating the present focus on a 'growth and jobs' paradigm. The next section outlines the potential advantages of replacing the EU mainstream policy agendas, such as the Lisbon and the Europe 2020, by an EU ESP-based policy agenda, in order to place transnational development at the core of EU policy design and implementation. The last section presents a concrete vision for placing ESP at the core of ECP strategic design, while proposing concrete, policy goals, targets, guidelines and principles for a post-2020 phase of this policy.

From a methodological standpoint, this article elaborates on two widely holistic concepts: territorial development and territorial cohesion, in order to propose an alternative conceptual vision for a post-2020 ECP. Moreover, it makes use of a wide set of theoretical contributions, both on ESP on ECP academic discussions. Furthermore, many of its proposals and conclusions are based on more than 20 years of experience in analysing and evaluating ECP related programmes and projects, and the consequent contacts with a myriad of politicians, officials, and practitioners, from which we obtained essential knowledge on the operational aspects and impacts of this policy in different European countries and regions.

## **2. Growth or Cohesion? A reflexion on the true purpose(s) of EU Cohesion Policy.**

ECP was elaborated to cope with the very large disparities in wealth amongst EU regions and countries (Molle, 2007). In view of the above, the main goal of ECP was to promote economic convergence by assisting less favoured regions, namely by means of investments funded by EU Structural and Cohesion Funds (Begg, 2010). From a formal perspective, however, "on 24 June 1988, the Council agreed on a regulation which put existing EU funds into the context of 'economic

and social cohesion’, a term which the Single European Act had introduced two years earlier” (EC, 2008: 1). In this stance, ECP was initially launched as a *socioeconomic cohesion* vehicle, and not as a *growth and investment* funding policy. Notwithstanding, since then, ECP went through significant changes, both in its strategic, management, control and audit approaches (Bauer, 2008; Davies and Polverari, 2011; Kassin, 2008).

Ultimately, ECP has been shaped by the adoption of several EU mainstream political agendas/strategies, like the ‘Lisbon Strategy’, the ‘Gothenburg Agenda’ and the ‘Europe 2020 Strategy’, which respectively: (i) placed a focus on growth, employment, and competitiveness; (ii) reinforced the vision for a sustainable development strategy; and (iii) promoted a paradigm for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Again, the ECP strategy rationale was greatly influenced by the entry into force of the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties, which respectively let to: (i) the introduction of the Cohesion Fund; (ii) the focus on employment and social aspects of development; and (iii) the inclusion of the goal of territorial cohesion, alongside the social and economic cohesion goals. Finally, the successive accession wave of new Member States (Sweden, Finland, and Austria in 1995; Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary in 2004; Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and Croatia: in 2013) led to a significant rise of sparsely populated and less-developed areas within the EU (Medeiros, 2016c).

All in all, these events induced successive adaptations in the ‘strategic rationale and governance architecture’ of ECP, with three distinct phases: (i) the ‘pre-Lisbon Strategy’ phase (1989-1999), marked by a *socioeconomic convergence* strategic rationale; (ii) the ‘lisbonization’ phase (2000-2013), which reinforced the *growth and employment paradigm*, while triggering a shift towards an emphasis on innovation; and (iii) the ‘Europe 2020’ phase (2014-2020), where the *growth* (smart, sustainable and inclusive) rationale took a primary role, while paradoxically a wider attention was given to the ‘territorial dimension’ of ECP.

In sum, according to Mendez (2011) the “Lisbonization” of ECP brought about several procedural innovations, mainly related with the governance model, with a view to promoting accountability and aligning EU and national goals through national plans. On its turn, Begg (2010) remembers that, from 2000 onwards, a wider integration of EU Structural funds was pursued, together with substantial re-orientation of the available ECP funding to the new Member States. However, he also notes (citing Heraud, 2007) that, from a strategic policy rationale, this new era of ECP saw a

gaining ascendancy of competitiveness over the solidarity or equity paradigm. This resulted from increasing globalisation pressures and the adoption of the Lisbon strategy guidelines. Alongside, one can add the capture of the 'Barroso Commission' by the 'private capital vision' of growth and competitiveness, and by an increasing neoliberalist agenda.

However, according to Mendez (2013), the most significant makeover of ECP took place during the post-2013 proposals, with a view to: (i) spread its support more evenly across the EU; (ii) pursue a more integrated territorial development approach across all shared management funds; (iii) focus expenditure within Europe 2020 priorities; and (iv) promote more rigorous target-setting and conditionalities (see Bachtler and Ferry, 2015), amongst others. Likewise, Begg (2010: 78) concludes that, by then, a considerable attention was placed "on the 'territorial' dimension of cohesion, which has connotations of spatial planning at the level of the EU as a whole". Hence, while the 'growth and competitiveness' paradigm gaining ground within the ECP strategic design, the same happened with the awareness of promotion of a more 'integrated and territorial approach' in ECP project design and implementation.

By implication, from a political narrative perspective on its strategic principles, there are some evidences which indicate this gradual shift into a more neoliberal agenda and a gradual erosion of the ECP's foundational principles (see Mendez, 2013; Begg, 2010), namely in the two most recent programming periods. Indeed, for the 2014-2020 programming cycle, the 'growth and jobs' narrative was translated into the main goal of ECP. At the same time, the translation of the Europe 2020 objectives into place-based frameworks was considered insufficient, namely by the Committee of the Regions (CoR, 2009), despite the spotlight placed on 'smart specialization' strategies (McCann and Ortega-Argilés, 2015), which aim to help European regions to focus on their specific strengths, in order to increase local economic and cultural potentials (Solly, 2016: 194).

In sum, facing with mounting globalisation processes and neoliberalist political agendas, ECP has gradually shifted its strategic design from the initial goals of achieving socioeconomic cohesion into the present goals of fomenting growth and jobs. However, from a funding distribution perspective, ECP have always kept an 'EU territorial cohesion perspective', by channelling the bulk of the financing into the less developed regions of the EU (EC, 2014), and by supporting all dimensions of territorial cohesion (see Medeiros, 2016d). A more awkward plea is the growing support to territorial integration and place-based processes supported by recent ECP 'related funds' regulations. By implication, ECP intrinsic purposes to support 'cohesion policy processes' have not

been erased from its core. And this, in our view, provides the necessary fertile ground to place ESP as strategic design paradigm for future potential ECP programming periods.

### **3. Spatial Planning as a (re)trigger for Territorial Development and Cohesion visions for an uncertain EU**

#### *3.1. European Spatial Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*

For the past years, ESP has been emerging not only as a response to address EU real problems and needs, but also as an instrument “to help reconcile the potentially contradictory core EU objectives of economic competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainable development” (Dühr, *et al.*, 2010: 5). At the same time, a rich vein of theoretical reasoning invokes the limitations associated with the ‘economic growth and competitiveness’ vision for policy implementation, vis-a-vis a more broad and complete vision of ‘territorial development and cohesion’. More particularly, Stutz and Warf (2012: 368) advocate that “in conventional usage, development is a synonym for economic growth. But growth is not development (...)”, as the latter is a multidimensional concept, thus going beyond economic competitiveness, while encompassing concerns over social, environmental and democratic related values.

One prevailing vision of development relates it with the necessary “change that is intended to lead to the betterment of people and places around the globe” (Potter *et al.*, 2008: 6). Moreover, the idea of development carries connotations with the notion of progress (Thomas, 2000), and this, in turn led the United Nations to state that “human development is about much more than the rise or fall of national incomes” (UNDP, 2001: 9). Likewise, the notion of territorial cohesion is multi-dimensional (Faludi, 2004; Medeiros, 2016d), and only differs from the concept of territorial development, as the latter can be attained in in all regions (positive change in most development dimensions) at the same time, while the former is not (positive change is higher in already most developed region of a given territory).

As such, in our understanding, ECP ultimate goal should focus on achieving ‘territorial cohesion’, rather than ‘growth’. As expressed in the article 3 of the EU Treaty, the EU “shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity among Member States” (EU, 2010: 17). More acutely, the article 174 states that “in order to promote its overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social

and territorial cohesion” (EU, 2010: 127). Drawing upon this EU mainstream political goal, ECP can be regarded as a concrete political tool to achieve it. So how can an ‘ESP based strategy’ be more effective in the strategic design of the ECP than mainstream EU political agendas, such as the Lisbon and Europe 2020 EU strategies? To answer this question we firstly we need to better differentiate both.

### *3.2. Advantages of European Spatial Planning over EU mainstream strategies*

In simple terms and according to the EU Compendium of Spatial Planning Systems and Policies (EC, 1997: 24) spatial planning “refers to the methods used largely by public sector to influence the future distribution of activities in space. It is undertaken with the aims of creating a more rational territorial organization of land uses and linkages between them, to balance demands for development with the need to protect the environment, can to achieve social and economic objectives. Spatial planning embraces measures to co-ordinate spatial impacts of other sectoral policies, to achieve a more even distribution of economic development between regions that would otherwise be created by marked forces, and to regulate the conversion of land and property uses (...)”.

As seen, this mid-1990s notion of spatial planning encompasses both: (i) ‘policy strategic planning’ on the need to plan economic, social and environmental aspects of policies, in order to achieve a more harmonized and sustainable distribution of activities, and also (ii) ‘legislation regulative planning’ processes, associated to the need to regulate land uses (see Albrechts, 2006; Davoudi and Strange, 2007; Kidd and Shaw, 2013; Morphet, 2011). Here, we see eye to eye with Faludi (2010:3) when he understands ESP as “the mode of operation in strategic spatial planning”, notably by “appreciating a territory relevant to solving one or more issues and formulating appropriate joint spatial strategies or visions”.

Similarly, the mentioned EU Compendium of Spatial Planning highlighted another crucial aspect to ESP when it recognised that “spatial planning encompasses elements of national and transnational planning, regional policy, and regional planning (...)’ (EC, 1997:24). In a more simplified way, we propose a definition of ESP as ‘strategic spatial plan for promoting territorial development and cohesion at the EU level, with a view to anticipating transnational territorial changes, tackle transnational territorial needs, and promoting transnational territorial potentials, within the EU territory and adjacent countries’.

In much the same way, the EU mainstream policy agendas (Lisbon and Europe 2020) define a set of goals for the development of the EU territory. However, both concentrate their action on aspects related with the triad ‘economy + society + environment’, while lacking a more holistic and territorial approach for development, thus the need for the publication of the two Territorial Agendas (Territorial Agenda 2007, 2011). A commonly held view regards those Agendas as an expansion of the ESDP (Moreno, 2012: 351). Taken all together, comparably, an ESP strategy presents the following advantages over the mentioned EU policy strategic agendas:

- It adds a territorial dimension to policy strategic planning, by going beyond the economy-society-environment strategic development triad vision;
- It provides a place-based approach by identifying the territorial needs and potentials of the EU territory at all territorial levels: local, regional, national, transnational and European;
- It offers a means to better interconnect and integrate existing regional, national and transnational (read macro-regional strategies - see Medeiros, 2013);
- It opens an avenue to make a more effective use of the work done by the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), namely in unveiling the EU territory needs, potentials and challenges;
- It elevates the role of Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) procedures as a EU principal policy evaluation process;
- It contributes to elevate the goals of promoting territorial development and territorial cohesion, instead of a social, economic and green growth paradigm.

In the same way, Dühr *et al.*, (2010:11) identify a set of arguments both for and against a European dimension of spatial planning. On the positive side, they argue that ESP: (i) is required to coordinate EU policies and actions which have spatial dimensions and impacts; (ii) is needed to develop and implement EU policy goals of promoting balanced spatial development; (iii) is needed to engage on new forms of transnational territorial governance, which deals more effectively with functional regions; (iv) can prevent damaging competition and free riders on improving environmental conditions or economic competitiveness; (v) is required to avoid distortions to the Single Market provoked by varying approaches to spatial planning; (vi) can help to resolve the competing objectives of economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental



sustainability; and (vii) can provide a model of democratic and socially led spatial organisation for existing and new Member States, and neighbouring countries.

Alternatively, for Kunzmann (2006:58), spatial planning is instrumental for reinforcing territorial governance processes, namely by: (i) providing spatial knowledge to policy makers; (ii) preparing the ground and showing directions for infrastructure development; (iii) strengthening local and regional institutions; and (iv) involving citizens in regional communication processes. In this domain we can detect a fundamental relation between the advantages of implementing ESP processes and EU multilevel governance which characterises ECP.

### *3.3. European Spatial Planning: an informal crystallisation path through territorial cooperation?*

The publication of ‘spatial planning visions’ for the EU territory is far from being recent, as in 1983 the EU adopted the European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter, in Torremolinos (Faludi, 2010; Medeiros, 2014c). In the following, and while the ESP mother document (ESDP) was not released two other related ESP documents were published: (i) the Europe 2000 (EC, 1991) and (ii) the Europe 2000+ (EC, 1994). Curiously, by now, no update was provided for the ‘old ESDP’, despite the successive EU territorial enlargement, and the emergence of novel territorial development challenges (economic and migration crisis, climate changes, etc.). Again, the fact the ESP is not regarded as an EU formal competence can explain a non-update of the ESDP. Even so, since the publication of this document, the idea of an ESP was translated into an EU vision of Territorial Cohesion (Faludi, 2006), followed by the discussion of this notion in the Second (EC, 2001) and Third Cohesion (EC, 2004) reports.

But more importantly, the formation of the ESPON, in 2002, and the consequent work on analysing territorial trends in the EU territory, can be regarded a crystallisation process of a ‘non-formal ESP platform’ within the EU, as it prompted visibility to a myriad of territorial trends in the EU territory. Moreover, it has allowed for the production of several studies which relate ECP interventions and their impacts (ESPON ATLAS; 2006, 2014). In the end, the ESPON programme has been given its contribution to better understand the effects of EU funded policies and to highlight the need to promote a more territorial integration process in EU policy implementation, based on an appreciation of the territory and its potentials (Faludi, 2010:2-3). In sum, for Waterhout (2008:9), the current ESP process “centres around four pillars: the ESDP, the INTERREG programme, the ESPON programme and, the most recent achievement, the Territorial Agenda of the EU”.

However, the controversy surrounding the need for ESP is ongoing. As Faludi (2010:1) concludes, its requisite for the EU depends on one's view of planning and the EU itself. Understandably, for European spatial planners "the European dimension of spatial planning arises from a recognized and growing need for coordination of spatial development trends and EU spatial policy across policy sectors, across levels of government from the EU to the local level, and across national borders" (Dühr, *et al.*, 2010: 4-5).

In the end, for anyone involved in territorial analysis related to EU cross-border and transnational territorial processes, normally associated with the EU INTERREG programmes, it is not difficult to understand the need for an EU transnational approach to addressing concrete needs and making the most of out of EU transnational territorial potentials. For these and other reasons, "despite this apparent lack of competence, there has been a lot of activity on spatial planning at the EU level involving the member states working 'intergovernmentally' with support from the European Commission" (Dühr, *et al.*, 2010: 15).

Another 'positive impact' from the work carried out by the elaboration of the ESDP was the continuous institutionalisation of spatial planning processes across several EU Member States, as Waterhout (2008) demonstrates in his seminal work on ESP, despite its minimal influence at the EU level. The same author reminds us also of the importance of the INTERREG II-C, and the following INTERREG III-B (transnational cooperation) programmes, as a concrete test-ground platforms for applying the ESDP messages. This conclusion peps out the idea that ESP and ECP have been related for quite a long period, one way or the other, namely by the operationalisation of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) processes. However, as Kunzmann (2006: 57) reiterates, ESP is still a weak policy field in the EU, and that "much of the opposition to spatial planning as an important public sector action field is based on prejudice, lack of information, or just unwillingness to accept the leading role of the public sector on territorial development".

Nevertheless, it would appear reasonably to surmise that "spatial planning strategies operating at multiple scales have in the last decade come to be viewed as key policy instruments for effective territorial governance" (Walsh, 2014:306). There are, however, positive developments regarding the effects of ECP in promoting a more integrated approach to policy design and policy making. These have sparked not only transnational and macro-regional planning processes (Medeiros, 2013), but also some attempts to promote cross-border spatial planning processes, which are still

relative new in the EU, despite being one of the main challenges for the EU border regions development process (Durand, 2014; Medeiros, 2014d;). As Faludi (2014:165) concludes, despite the reluctance from the EC in activating a share-competence for territorial cohesion and ESP, the “INTERREG continues to give planners experience in working on cross-border, transnational and European scales, and ESPON too may become a site for this progressive Europeanisation of planning”.

### *3.4. European Spatial Planning: consolidating a change from a result-oriented into an impact-oriented EU Cohesion Policy*

Far from signalling the end of ESP, the EU territorial cohesion narrative gained momentum within the EU political agenda, and culminated with the inclusion of this multidimensional and holistic concept in the Lisbon Treaty. Indeed, as Molle (2007: 84) points out, the operational concept of territorial cohesion should be found on spatial planning related documents. On another perspective, territorial cohesion has rapidly gained currency within the EU political meanders, in order to avoid any association with regulative land-use planning (Faludi, 2010:1). By way of illustration, the same author proclaims that: “like spatial planning, territorial cohesion policy is about integrating policies with a spatial impact”.

To that degree, ECP is spread-out to all EU (and some non-EU) regions. However, its effects vary from Member State to Member State and from region to region. For the most part, its territorial impacts have been more positive in less-developed Member States (see Medeiros, 2014, 2014b, 2016, 2016b), as ECP funding has remained concentrated in less developed regions (62% from 1989 until 2020 – see EC, 2014:187). For this, and many other reasons, the ability to prove ECP’s effectiveness and value for money is far from being consensual (Bachtler, *et al.*, 2009; Polverani, 2016; Rodriguez-Pose and Fratesi, 2004). This includes the assessment of its impacts in all territorial development domains, and its dependency on the quality of government and governance systems, amongst other aspects.

From the onset, ECP has institutionalised policy evaluation mechanisms, in order to unveil its main outcomes, results and impacts (see EC, 1999b). Nevertheless, the result-orientation approach has been slow to catch on. For that matter, the 2014-20 regulations included a set of new obligations intended to improve policy results-orientation, both at the programme design and implementation phases (Polverani, 2016:59). Alongside, the degree of policy accountability has also been increasing

overtime, with more responsibilities being shared by the European Commission (EC) with the Member States, namely in budget implementation (Davies and Polverari, 2011). Even so, some allude to weak EU control mechanisms (Blom-Hansen, 2005).

However, if there is one aspect in which the ESPON programme has forged new horizons for EU policy implementation was its contribution to the elaboration of different methods of TIA policy evaluation procedures, despite their excessive simplicity in view of properly evaluating the impacts of policies/programmes/projects (Medeiros, 2016e). In fact, the increasing attempts to promote TIA procedures have been borrowed from the tradition of spatial planning in certain European countries (Molle, 2007: 110). Again, in our perspective, the adoption of an ESP policy strategy vision, which guides the application of EU funding, would have positive effects in placing an ‘impact-oriented’ rather than a ‘result-oriented’ paradigm for EU policy evaluation processes.

#### **4. A synthetic Spatial Planning Strategic vision for the EU post-2020**

In the previous sections we presented a case to place ESP at the heart of EU strategic development visions for the post-2020 period. This section takes this idea a bit further, by presenting a summarized ESP strategic vision, with which EU policies, and namely ECP, should align with. As expected, following from the above discussions, this proposed strategic vision undercuts the common assumption that the goal of EU policies is ultimately to promote ‘territorial cohesion’ and ‘territorial development’, and not ‘growth’. Running parallel to this rationale, we propose a ‘one goal - four targets’ strategy, encompassing fundamental dimensions and respective elements of territorial cohesion and territorial development: (i) Green Economy; (ii) Balanced Territory; (iii) Good Governance; and (iv) Social Cohesion (Fig. 1).

Drawing on a distinction with the EUROPE 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, this proposed strategy elevates the notions of development and cohesion, vis-à-vis the narrow notion of ‘growth’ - thus (re)introducing the initial goals of the ECP -, while including a clear territorial dimension to a EU strategic vision, which was absent from the EUROPE 2020.

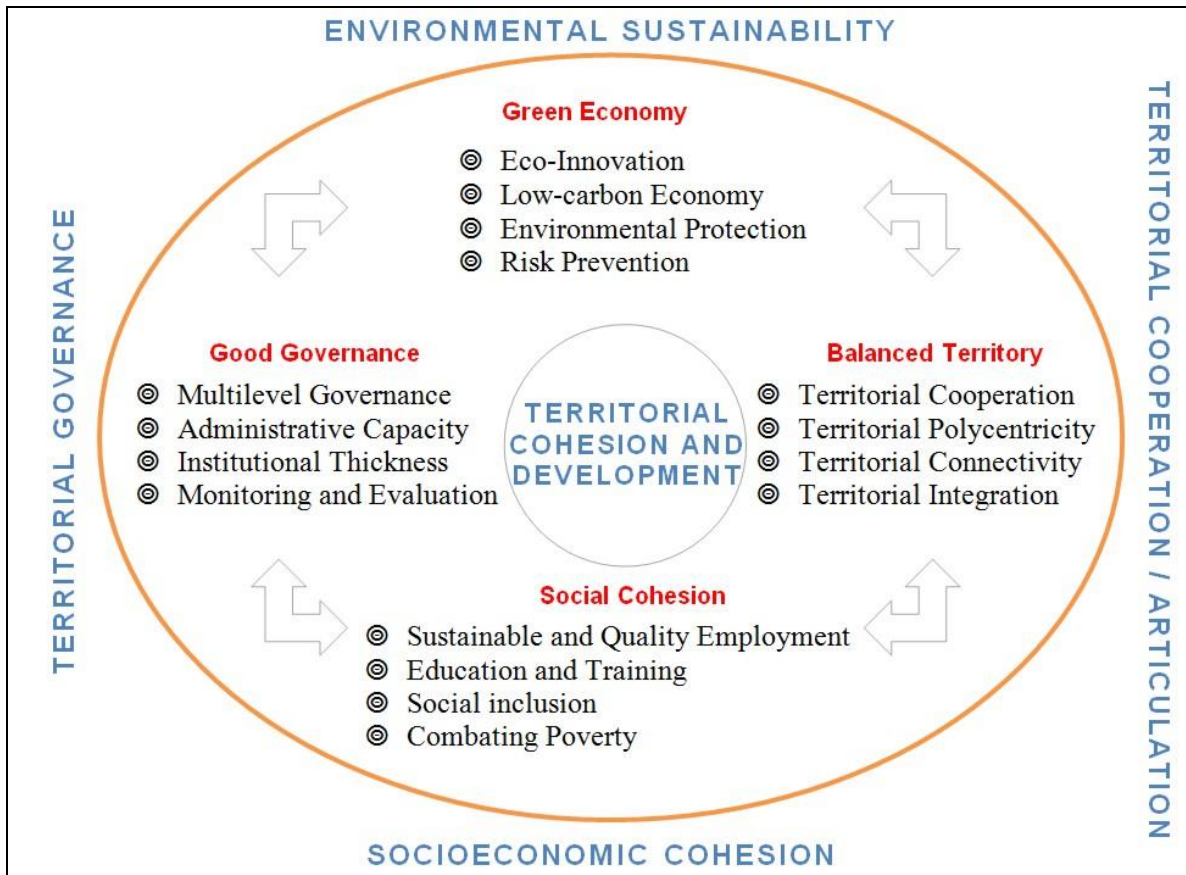


Fig. 1 - ECP post-2020 Strategy: One Goal, Four Targets

As expected, there would be a wealth of implications for a post-2020 ECP following the adoption of an ESP strategic vision for a renovated EU policy agenda. More acutely, the existing eleven thematic objectives for ECP would be eliminated, as they contradict the place-base and smart-specialisation rationale of policy implementation. On top of this, the present ECP main goals (two) of promoting ‘growth and jobs’ and ‘territorial cooperation’ would be replaced by one main goal: ‘achieving territorial development and cohesion’. At the same time, the ETC goal would be elevated to a wider role (both strategically and financially) within this new territorial-driven ECP implementation approach (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Table 1 - Financial Distribution proposal for ECP post-2020 per territorial level

<b>Territorial Level</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Programme/Projects</b>
Transnational	40	Large Impact Projects + INTERREG B
Cross-Border	15	INTERREG-A
National	15	Sectoral Operational Programmes
Regional	15	Regional Operational Programmes
Urban	15	Urban Development + INTERREG Europe

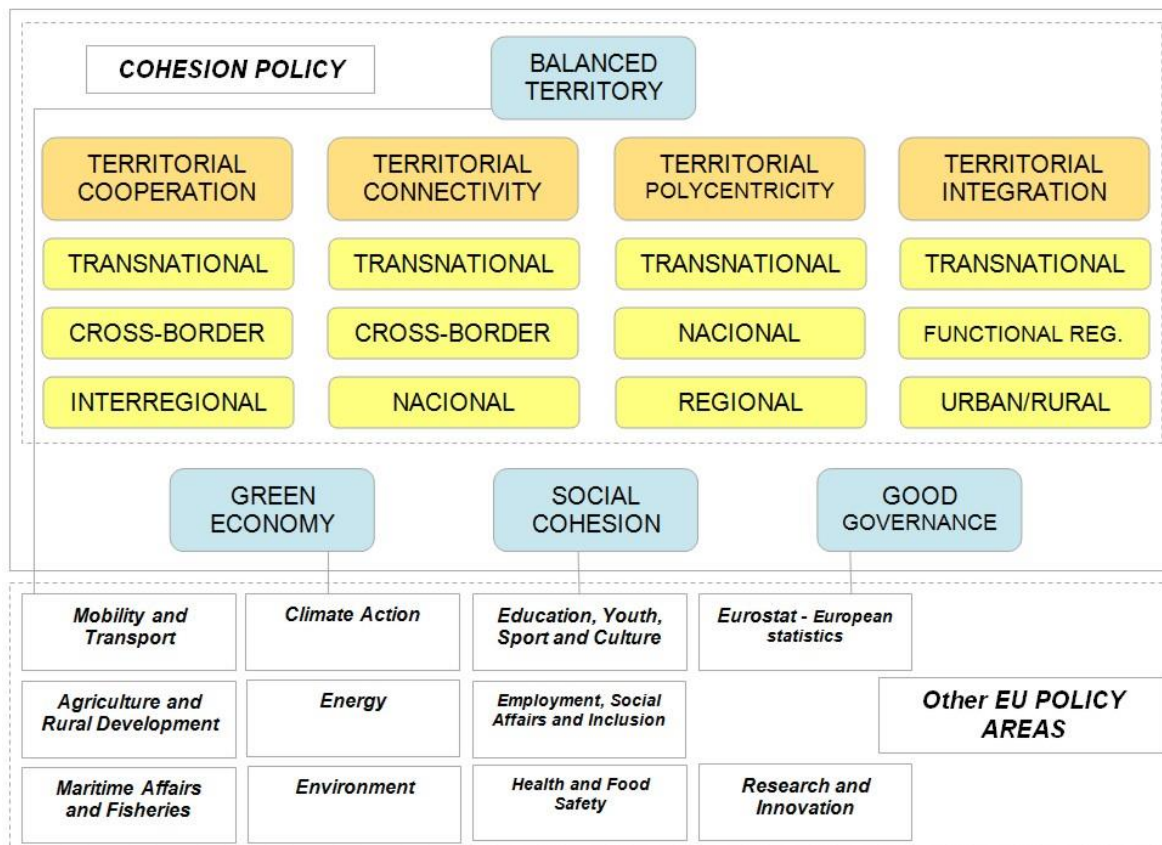


Fig. 2 - ECP territorial-driven strategy 2021-2026

In sum, we propose that a post-2020 ECP is built upon an ESP transnational development approach, thus placing the present transnational and cross-border programmes at the heart of this policy. Ultimately, the related territorial cooperation projects/programmes should be based on large impact transnational and cross-border projects with the goal to promote: (i) a green economy; (ii) a balanced EU territory; (iii) good governance practices; and (iv) social cohesion. At the same time, the process of cross-border cooperation would be fundamentally centred in: (i) reducing the persistent barriers posed by the presence of administrative boundaries; (ii) valorising the territorial capital of the border region; and (iii) implementing cross-border planning strategies (Medeiros, 2017).

As regards the ECP principles and guidelines for the post-2020 period, for the most part we suggest the keeping of existing ones. Beyond this, we propose a new set of principles and guidelines (Table 2) with a view to bring forward and solidify ESP as a cornerstone for ECP design and implementation, and also to elevate TIA procedures as a mainstream policy for ex-ante, mid-term, and ex-post evaluation procedures. Also important, from our understanding, is the need to establish a financially independent monitoring/evaluation structure for EU funded

projects/programmes/policies, as opposed to current practices where policies/programmes/projects finance their own monitoring/evaluation reports. The main idea is to improve transparency and quality on of EU policies evaluation procedures.

Table 2 - ECP post-2020 guidelines and principles

Keep Original Principles	Add New Principles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focusing on the poorest and most backward regions</li> <li>• Multi-annual programming</li> <li>• Strategic orientation of investments</li> <li>• Involvement of regional and local partners - partnership</li> <li>• Subsidiarity + Concentration + Additionality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Territorial Planning: EU/Transnational/Cross-Border</li> <li>• Independency: Monitoring/Policy evaluation</li> <li>• Focus in Impacts: Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA)</li> <li>• Place Basely: Tailor Made to territorial needs/potentials</li> </ul>
Keep Original Guidelines	Add New Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)</li> <li>• Focus on Community Led Local Development (CLLD)</li> <li>• Sustainable Urban Development (SUD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Large Impact Projects (LIP)</li> <li>• Focus on Transnational Cooperation Projects (TCP)</li> <li>• Focus on Cohesion and Development (CoDev)</li> <li>• Increase Simplification of Project Management Governance (SPMG)</li> <li>• Create supra-Projects/Programmes Monitoring/Evaluation Structure (PMES)</li> <li>• Focus on Anchor Cities of Less Developed Areas (ACIT)</li> </ul>

Such EU policy territorial integrated approaches, arising from a wider translational planning focus, would require, for instance: (i) the concentration of funding in less-developed regions' anchor urban centres (Fig. 3), in order to promoting a more balanced and polycentric territory, in a more efficient way: (ii) the concentration of investments on tapping transnational renewable energy potentials, with a view to promoting a more green and sustainable EU territory (Fig. 4); (iii) the support to a better governed territory, by focusing attention to transnational areas characterized by low levels of good governance/government (Fig. 5); and (iv) the attention to a more social inclusive territory, as social exclusion and poverty continues to affect large parts the EU territory (Fig. 6).

In the end, this proposed post-2020 ECP strategic vision, sustained by a projected ESP strategy development vision, is expected to place the EU territorial transnational development and integration approach at the forefront of EU policy-making, while tacking, in a more effective and efficient way, fundamental pillars to achieving territorial cohesion. Such an emphasis on ESP also intends to spark and consolidate a '60 year EU project' - which brought a new era of peace and prosperity to Europe - by solidifying a unique system of multi-level governance.



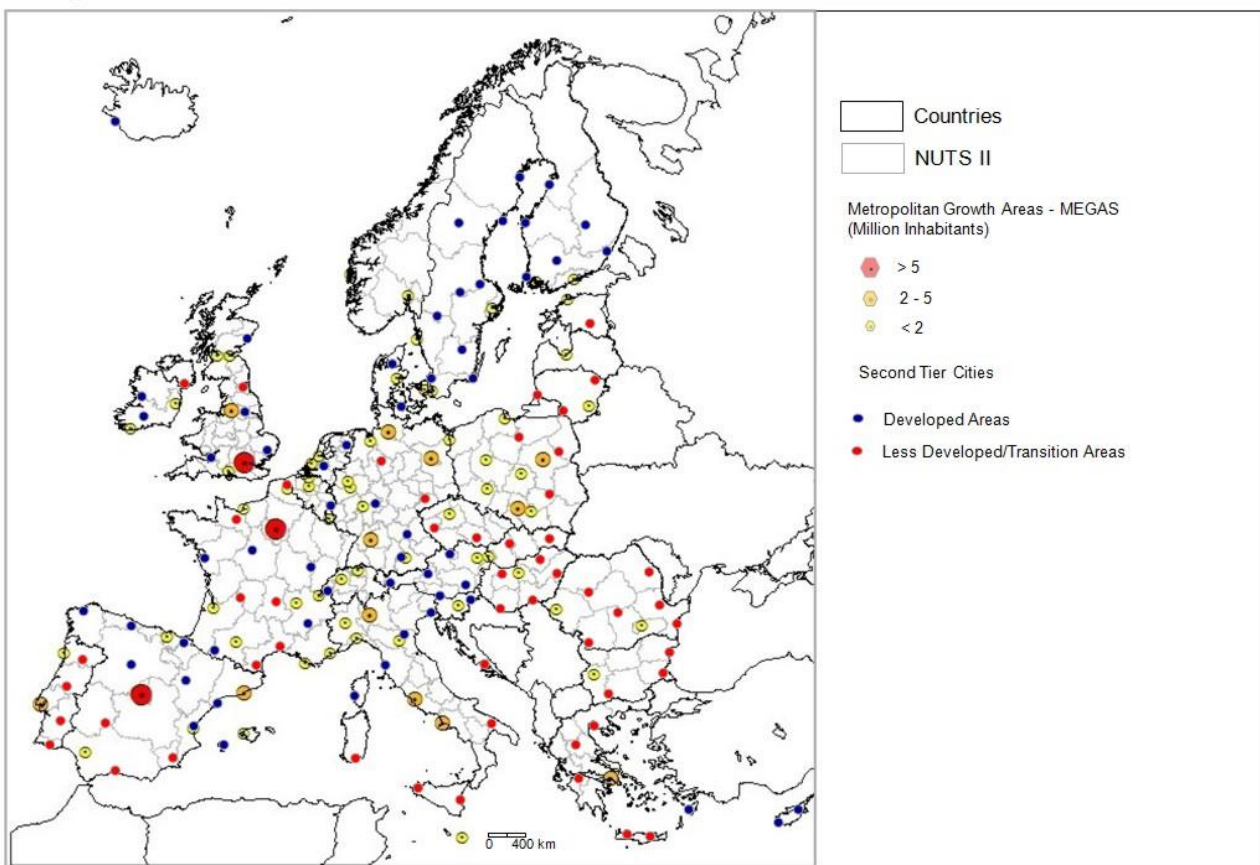


Fig. 3 MEGAS and second tier cities in the EU

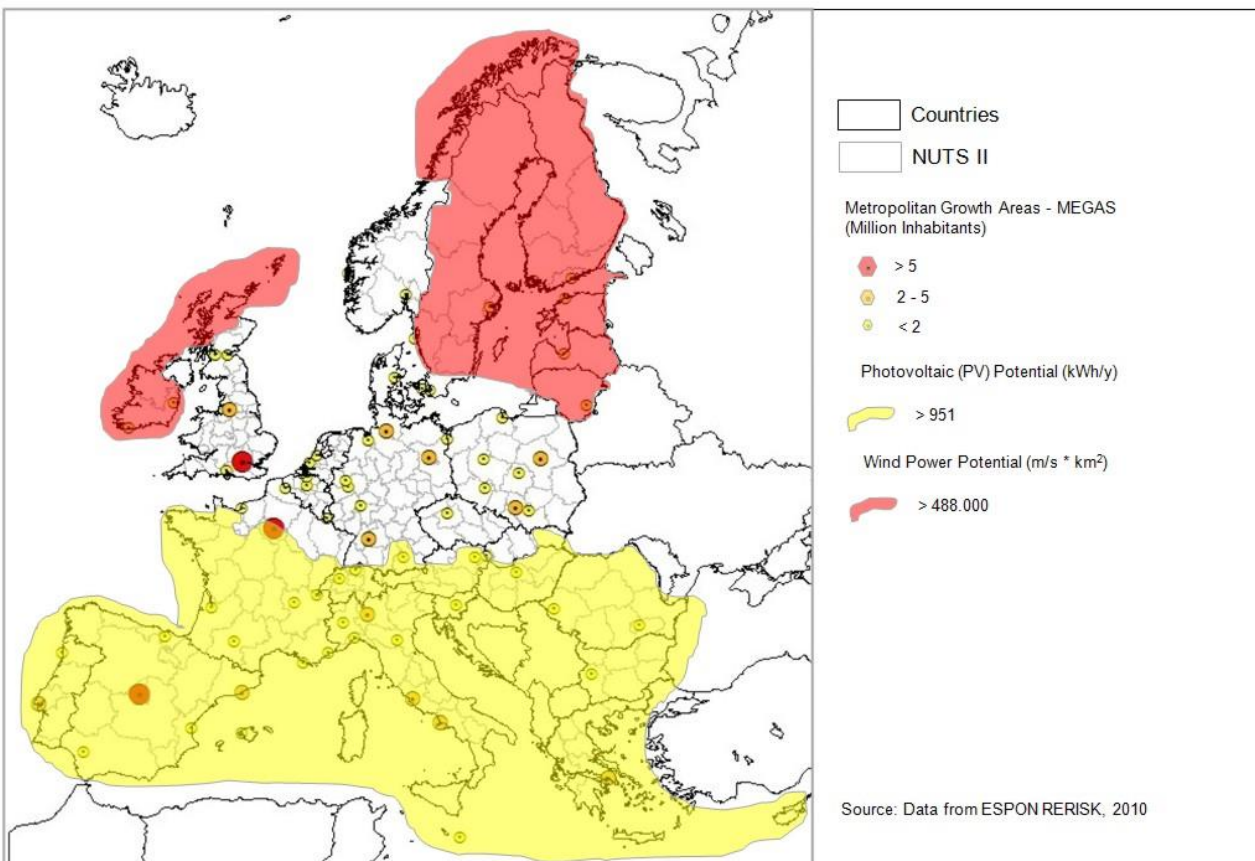


Fig. 4 - Europe of the Sun and Wind



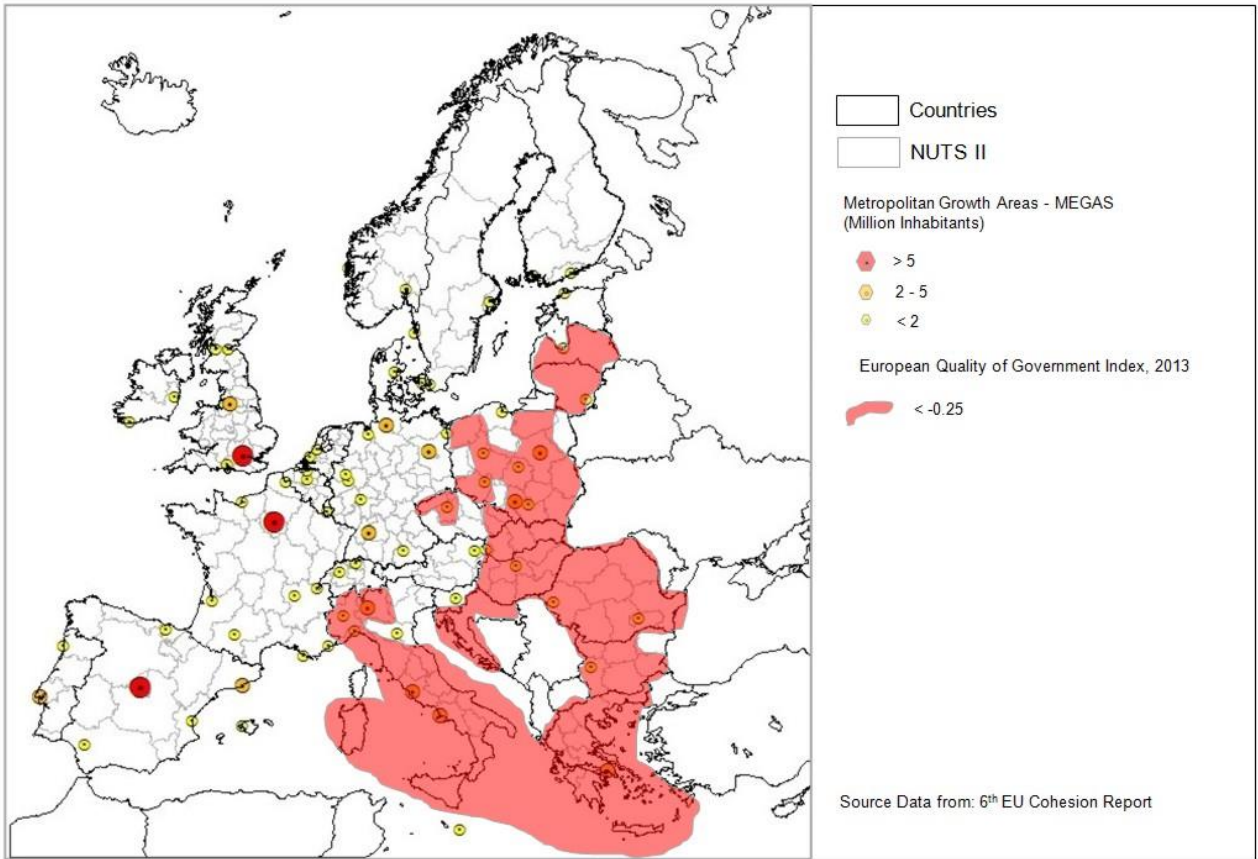


Fig. 5 - EUROPE of 'bad governance'

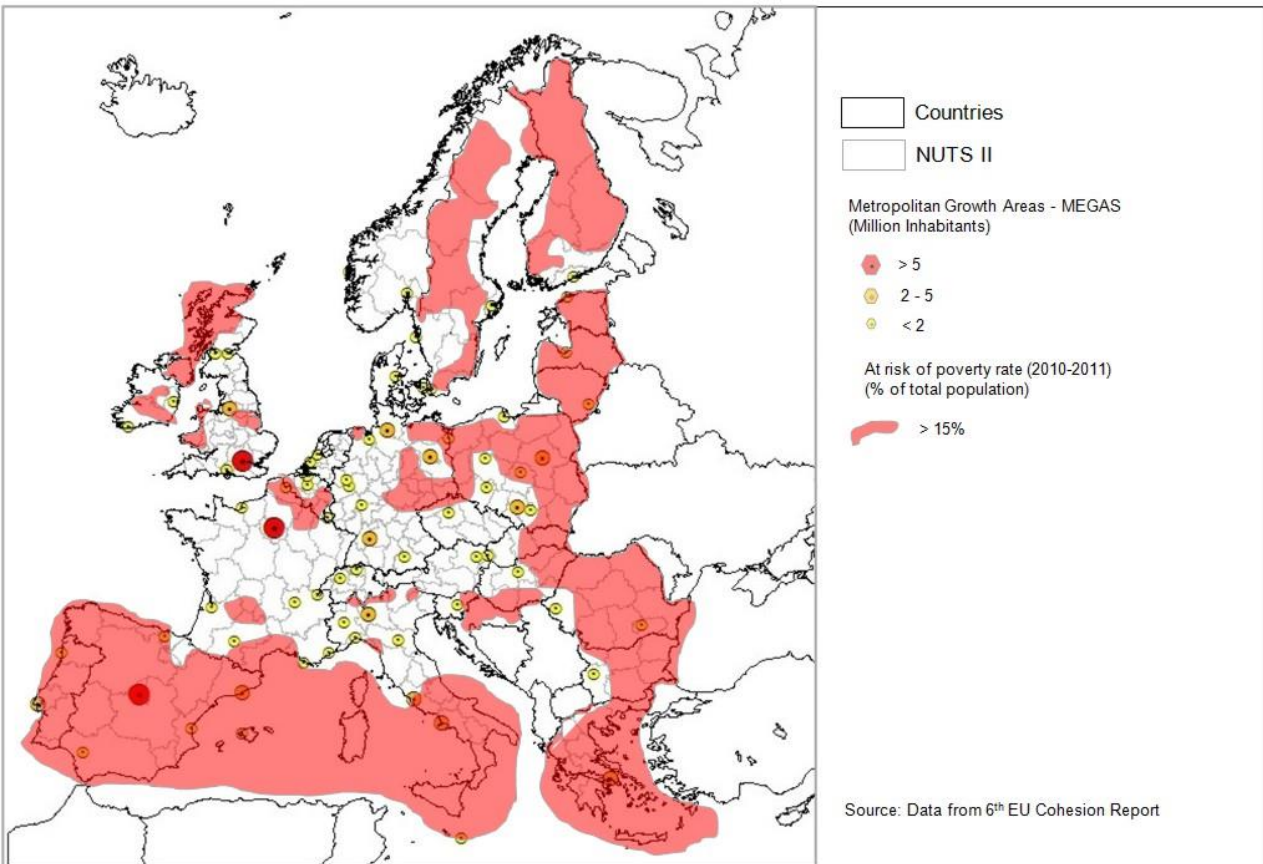


Fig. 6 - EUROPE of 'the poor's'

#### **4. Conclusion**

Despite continuous metamorphoses and adaptations to specific socioeconomic and political contexts, over its almost 30 years of existence, ECP has stayed tied to fundamental policy goals of correcting inequalities in several dimensions of territorial cohesion and development. Ultimately, its territorial impacts vary greatly from Member State to Member State, and from region to region. In general, less developed Member States, which absorbed higher volumes of EU funding, have had higher positive impacts, mostly in the socioeconomic dimension of territorial cohesion. This might have contributed to reduce the territorial disparities within the EU territory, as proclaimed by several EU Cohesion Reports (EC, 2014). However, rather than an agent of cohesion, ECP has favoured, directly or indirectly, for the most part, the capital cities and the more urbanised and socioeconomic dynamic areas within the EU Member States (see Medeiros, 2014, 2016, 2016b). In sum, by and large, ECP has had a positive contribution to territorial development all over the EU, but has not led to achieve the goal of territorial cohesion within the EU Member States.

Under this scenario, this article makes a case to place ESP at the heart of EU policy strategic design, in order to become a decisive factor to perfect the design and impacts of ECP post-2020, notably by leading to an improvement of its effectiveness and efficiency, and ultimately to achieve the goal of territorial cohesion, both at the EU and at the national levels. Furthermore, we suggest a (re)orientation of the ECP rationale towards its initial goals of promoting territorial development and cohesion, rather than a more simplified EU policy narrative of 'growth'. Moreover, even though we are aware that ESP is not an EU formal legal competence, we propose that all the efforts made up until now by several EU initiatives which have been promoting it (ESDP, the Territorial Agendas, the INTERREG and the ESPON) are crystalized in an organized and updated EU strategic policy agenda, based on an EU transnational development strategic paradigm.

In accepting this ESP strategic policy framework proposal, the EU would delve more deeply on the EU territorial integration, place-based and smart specialisation narratives, which have been adopted by the EC in recent years. Besides, it would prompt a mounting effort to better integrate all territorial levels of spatial planning (EU, transnational, cross-border, national, regional), which have already been triggered by the implementation of ECP in several countries. Furthermore, it would lead to an improvement of coordination in the implementation of sectoral policies with territorial dimension, and also to finally triggering the elaboration of EU cross-border and transnational spatial plans, which are still on an embryonic stage. Another key claim for the advantages for the adoption

of such an ESP strategy, is that it would most likely induce a change of heart towards an impact-oriented policy monitoring/evaluation process, as opposed to the present ECP result-oriented rational. This would place TIA procedures at the forefront of EU policy evaluation, which is still on in an infancy stage.

To provide a foundation to our claims, we present a simplified ‘Spatial Planning Strategic vision for the EU post-2020’, and its influence on the strategic design of a post-2020 ECP. More precisely, we suggest a one goal-four targets policy. In concrete terms the present ECP goals of ‘growth and jobs’ and ‘ETC’ would be reduced to a mainstream goal of promoting territorial cohesion and development. This would not imply, however, a reduction of the importance of the ETC programmes. On the contrary, as both transnational and cross-border cooperation programmes would be elevated both in policy relevance and in funding allocation, as they would be regarded as adamant ESP processes to foment a more cohesive, harmonious, balanced and integrated EU territory.

Alongside, we propose a new set of guidelines and principles for the post-2020 ECP. Amongst them, we highlight the need to pursue a territorial-driven strategy, where the allocation of EU funds would need to support not only national and regional strategies by means of Operational Programmes, but also transnational and cross-border ones. Add to that, we suggest a stronger focus on large impact transnational projects and the concentration of investments on anchor cities of less developed regions, in order to increase the chances of achieving territorial cohesion within the EU and respective Member States.

All these consideration suggest, finally, that ESP is an adequate vehicle to promote and achieve, in a more effective and sound way, the goal expressed in the EU Treaty of a more harmonious, cohesive and balanced EU territory, namely by the operationalisation of the ECP. Moreover, as pointed out, the EU does not necessarily have to formally place spatial planning as one of its competences, in order to adopt a ESP-based policy development strategy, as ESP visions which are already present in mainstream documents and programmes (ESDP, Territorial Agendas, ESPON, INTERREG) have been integrated overtime at the national, regional and also by some transnational (macro-regional and cross-border) strategies in Europe. As such, the incorporation of an ESP vision into the EU policy agenda design would be regarded as a natural additional milestone to this recognition of the need to think and act strategically from a transnational territorial perspective.

## References:

- Albrechts, L. (2006). Bridge the gap: From spatial planning to strategic projects. *European Planning Studies*, 14(10), 1487–1500.
- Bachtler, J., Polverani, L.; Oraz, E. H.; Clement, K.; Tödtling-sch]onhoffer, H. (2009) *Ex Post Evaluation of Cohesion Policy Programmes 2000–2006 Co-financed by the ERDF (Objective 1 and 2): Management and Implementation Systems for Cohesion policy*, Report to the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), Brussels.
- Bachtler, J.; Ferry, M. (2015) Conditionality and the Performance of European Structural Funds: A Principal–Agent Analysis of Control Mechanisms in European Union Cohesion Policy, *Regional Studies*, 49(8): 1258-1273.
- Bauer, M. (2008) Organizational change, management reform and EU policy-making, *Journal of European Public Policy* 15: 627–647.
- Begg, I. (2010) ‘Cohesion or confusion: a policy searching for objectives’, *Journal of European Integration* 32(1): 77–96.
- Blom-Hansen, J. (2005) Principals, agents, and the implementation of EU cohesion policy, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12(4): 624-648.
- CoR (2009) Joint COTER-REGI meeting on the present and future benefits of cohesion policy, Background Note, 6.10.2009, Brussels.
- Davies, S.; Polverari, L. (2011) Financial Accountability and European Union Cohesion Policy, *Regional Studies*, 45(5): 695-706.
- Davoudi, S.; Strange, I. (Eds.) (2007) *Conceptions of space and place in strategic spatial planning*. Routledge, London.
- Durand, F. (2014) Challenges of Cross-Border Spatial Planning in the Metropolitan Regions of Luxembourg and Lille, *Planning Practice & Research*, 29(2): 113-132.
- Dühr, S, Colomb, C., Nadin, V. (2010). *European spatial planning and territorial cooperation*. New York: Routledge.
- EC (1991) *Europe 2000: outlook for the development of the community’s territory*, Commission of the European Communities, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, Luxembourg.
- EC (1994) *Europe 2000+. Cooperation for European territorial development*, European Commission, Luxembourg.
- EC (1997) *The EU Compendium of spatial planning systems and policies*, Regional Development Studies, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.

- EC (1999) *European spatial development perspective: Towards a balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- EC (1999b) *MEANS – Evaluation socio-economic programmes – Evaluating Design and Management*, Volume 1 — European Commission, Luxembourg.
- EC (2001) *Second Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, Unity, Solidarity, Diversity for Europe, its People and its Territory*, European Commission, Brussels.
- EC (2004) *Third Report on Economic and Social Cohesion, A New Partnership for Cohesion: Convergence, Competitiveness, Cooperation*, Communication from the Commission COM/2004/107. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg.
- EC (2008) *EU Cohesion Policy 1988-2008: Investing in Europe's future*, Panorama 26, Inforegio, European Union Regional Policy, Brussels.
- EC (2014) *Sixth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Investment for jobs and growth. Promoting development and good governance in EU regions and cities*, Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission, Brussels.
- ESPON ATLAS (2006) *Mapping the structure of the European Territory*, October, 2016, Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, European Spatial Planning Observatory Network, Luxembourg.
- ESPON ATLAS (2014) *Mapping European Territorial Structures and Dynamics*, November 2014, European Spatial Planning Observatory Network, Luxembourg.
- EU (2010) *Consolidating versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, (2010/C 83/01) EN 30.3.2010 Official Journal of the European Union Volume 53, European Union.
- Faludi, A. (2004) Territorial Cohesion: Old (French) Wine in New Bottles?, *Urban Studies*, 41(7): 1349–1365.
- Faludi, A. (2006) From European spatial development to territorial cohesion policy, *Regional Studies*, 40(6), 667-678, DOI: 10.1080/00343400600868937
- Faludi, A. (2010) *Cohesion, Coherence, Cooperation: European Spatial Planning Coming of Age?*, Routledge, New York.
- Faludi, A. (2014) Europeanisation or Europeanisation of spatial planning?, *Planning Theory & Practice*, 15(2): 155-169.
- Ferrão, J. (2003) A emergência de estratégias transnacionais de ordenamento do território na União Europeia: reimaginar o espaço europeu para criar novas formas de governança territorial? *GeoNOVA* 7: 11-37.
- Ferrão, J. (2010) *Ordenamento do território: 25 anos de aprendizagem?* in Europa Novas Fronteiras, Portugal – 25 anos de Integração Europeia, Princípios, 26/27: 77-84.

- Kassim, H. (2008) 'Mission impossible', but mission accomplished: the Kinnock reforms and the European Commission, *Journal of European Public Policy* 15(5): 648–68.
- Kidd, S.; Shaw, D. (2013) Reconceptualising territoriality and spatial planning: insights from the sea, *Planning Theory & Practice*, 14(2): 180-197.
- Kunzmann, K. (2006) *The Europeanization of Spatial Planning*, in Adams, N. *et al.* (Eds.) *Regional Development and Spatial Planning in an Enlarged European Union*, Ashgate, Aldershot: 43-63.
- McCann, P.; Ortega-Argilés, R. (2015) Smart Specialization, Regional Growth and Applications to European Union Cohesion Policy, *Regional Studies*, 49(8): 1291-1302, DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2013.799769
- Medeiros, E. (2013) Euro-Meso-Macro: The new regions in Iberian and European Space, *Regional Studies*, 47(8): 249-1266.
- Medeiros, E. (2014) Assessing Territorial Impacts of the EU Cohesion Policy: The Portuguese Case, *European Planning Studies*, 22(9): 1960-1988.
- Medeiros, E. (2014b) Assessing territorial impacts of the EU cohesion policy at the regional level: the case of Algarve, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32(3): 198-212.
- Medeiros, E. (2014c) The Europeanization of Spatial Planning processes in Portugal within the EU Cohesion policy Strategies (1989-2013), *Geography and Spatial Planning Journal*, 6: 201-222.
- Medeiros, E. (2014d) Is there a new TRUST in Inner Scandinavia, Evidence from Cross-Border Planning and Governance. *Geografiska Annaler*. 96 (4): 363–386.
- Medeiros, E. (2016) European Union Cohesion Policy and Spain: a territorial impact assessment, *Regional Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2016.1187719.
- Medeiros, E. (2016b) EU Cohesion Policy in Sweden (1995-2013) - A Territorial Impact Assessment, *European Structural & Investment Funds Journal*. 3(4): 254-275.
- Medeiros, E. (2016c) Is there a rise of the territorial dimension in EU Cohesion policy, *Finisterra*, 103(2016): 89-113.
- Medeiros, E. (2016d) Territorial Cohesion: An European Concept, *European Journal of Spatial Development*, 60. Available from: [http://www.nordregio.se/Global/EJSD/Refereed articles/refereed60.pdf](http://www.nordregio.se/Global/EJSD/Refereed%20articles/refereed60.pdf)
- Medeiros, E. (2016e) Territorial Impact Assessment and Public Policies: the case of Portugal and the EU, *Public Policy Portuguese Journal*, 1(1): 51-61.
- Medeiros, E. (2017) Cross-border cooperation in Inner Scandinavia: A Territorial Impact Assessment, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, 62(2017):147–157.

- Mendez, C. (2011) The Lisbonization of EU Cohesion Policy: A Successful Case of Experimentalist Governance?, *European Planning Studies*, 19(3): 519-537, DOI:10.1080/09654313.2011.548368
- Mendez, C. (2013) The post-2013 reform of EU cohesion policy and the place-based narrative, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(5): 639-659, DOI:10.1080/13501763.2012.736733
- Molle, W. 2007. *European cohesion policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Morphet, J. (2011) *Effective practice in spatial planning*. Routledge, London.
- Moreno, A. (2012) Integration of Hydrological and Regional and Urban Planning in Spain, In: *Advances in Spatial Planning*, (ed.) Jaroslav Burian, InTech, Rijeka: 331-336.
- Dühr, S., Colomb, C., Nadin, V. (2010) *European Spatial Planning and Territorial Co-operation*. London: Routledge.
- Polverani, L. (2016) The new ambitions for 2014-2020 European structural and investment funds evaluation: pouring water in a leaking container?, *European Structural and Investment Funds Journal*, 4(2): 59-67.
- Potter R.; Binns, T.; Elliott, J.; Smith, D. (2008) *Geographies of Development. An Introduction to Development Studies*, Third Edition, Pearson Education Limited, Essex.
- Rodriguez-Pose, A.; Fratesi, U. (2004) Between development and social policies: the impact of European Structural Funds in Objective 1 regions, *Regional Studies*, 38(1): 97–113.
- Solly, A (2016) Place-based innovation in Cohesion Policy: meeting and measuring the challenges, *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 3(1): 193-198, DOI:10.1080/21681376.2016.1150199
- Stutz, B.: Warf, B. (2012) *The World Economy. Geography, Business, Development*, Prentice Hall. Sixth Edition, New York.
- Territorial Agenda. (2007) *Territorial agenda of the European Union: Towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions*. Retrieved from <http://www.eu-territorial-agenda.eu/Reference%20Documents/Territorial-Agenda-of-the-European-Union-Agreed-on-25-May-2007.pdf>
- Territorial Agenda 2020. (2011) *Territorial agenda of the European Union 2020 – Towards an inclusive, smart and sustainable Europe of diverse regions*. Retrieved from <http://www.eu2011.hu/files/bveu/documents/TA2020.pdf>
- Thomas, A. (2000) Development as practice in a Liberal Capitalist World, *Journal of International Development*, 12, 773-787.
- UNDP (2001) *Human Development Report, 2001: Promoting Linkages*, United Nations Development Programme. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Walsh, C. (2014) Rethinking the Spatiality of Spatial Planning: Methodological Territorialism and Metageographies, *European Planning Studies*, 22(2): 306-322.

Waterhout, B. (Ed.) (2008) The institutionalisation of European Spatial Planning, *Sustainable Urban Areas*, n°18, Delft University of Technology, Delft.

---

<sup>i</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/)