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Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2024-06-03

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Medeiros, E. & Caramelo, S. (2023). EU policies and strategies and territorial cohesion. In Eduardo Medeiros (Ed.), *Public policies for territorial cohesion*. (pp. 3-19). Cham: Springer.

Further information on publisher's website:

[10.1007/978-3-031-26228-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26228-9_1)

Publisher's copyright statement:

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# Chapter 1

## EU policies and strategies and Territorial Cohesion

Eduardo Medeiros & Sérgio Caramelo

### Abstract:

Territorial cohesion is an EU concept and, in recent decades, several EU policies, such as the EU Cohesion Policy, have contributed decisively to promoting territorial development in socioeconomically lagging EU regions. It resembles a European political ideal that collectively we try to achieve, but without knowing very well what it is. However, as several studies have concluded, although at the EU level certain territorial cohesion trends have been attained in some policy arenas, at the national level there is no clear evidence that EU policies have contributed to achieving territorial cohesion trends in recent decades in EU member states. In this context, this chapter critically discusses the evolution of EU policies and strategies to promote territorial cohesion in the EU territory since the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy (1989). Crucially, it presents a critical overview of policy rationales presented by EU development agendas (e.g. Lisbon, Europe 2020, etc.), the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Green Paper for Territorial Cohesion, as well as the three EU territorial agendas. It concludes that territorial cohesion has never been at the core of EU mainstream development agendas and that the territorial agendas have not yet contributed to inverting this panorama. It also concludes that EU Cohesion Policy, with the exception of the current programming period (2021–27) has never included all the crucial dimensions of territorial cohesion in its main strategic objectives: socioeconomic cohesion + environmental sustainability + territorial cooperation/governance + morphologic polycentricity.

**Keywords:** Territorial Cohesion, EU Cohesion Policy, Territorial Agendas, EU Development Agendas, Territorial Development

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## 1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that territorial cohesion is mainly a European Union (EU) concept, and is still fuzzy and vague (Dao et al., 2017; Medeiros, 2016b). This EU policy concept took central stage, in a formal manner, in the EU Amsterdam treaty (Servillo, 2010). However, its meaning and policy relevance have since remained largely contested (González et al., 2015) and subject to systematic negotiations (Van Well, 2012). On a positive note, territorial cohesion has triggered a novel dimension in EU policy debates (Davoudi, 2005), and contributed to stimulating a wealth of literature on the relevance of the territorial dimension of policies (Medeiros, 2017a). It has also given rise to a more comprehensive impact assessment method to be used by EU entities, named territorial impact assessment (TIA) (Medeiros, 2020d). Moreover, as Schön (2005) and Abrahams (2014) claim, territorial cohesion has become a new buzzword for a European spatial planning strategy, largely focused on a polycentric urban network rationale, and as a counterbalance of the policy-centred growth and competitiveness rationale (Vanolo, 2010). On the other hand, to invoke Faludi (2007), territorial cohesion has also contributed to reinforcing the notion of a European model of society in concrete policy areas on various territorial scales.

It is under this dual policy and scientific background that this chapter proposes to present an overall overview of the relevance of territorial cohesion for mainstream EU policy development strategies. Firstly, territorial cohesion is now both a formal and relatively invoked EU policy goal and is still somewhat debated and analysed by several scholars, both in terms of its conceptual meaning and, in lesser measure, presenting methods to measure its trends in a given territory. Secondly, so far, territorial cohesion has never truly taken centre stage in EU development strategies and the main goals of EU Cohesion Policy. Likewise, in the academic domain, territorial cohesion studies and analysis have never attracted the attention of the academic community in comparison to regional and urban development and planning studies, and especially economic growth-related analysis.

In this context, the research fundamental question of this chapter is: ‘How far is territorial cohesion considered in EU mainstream development strategies as a key EU public policy?’ As

regards public policies, a wealth of literature advances that public policies fail if they do not reach their main goals and expected target groups (Huencho, 2022). In addition, the whole life cycle of public policy, with possible feedbacks between different territorial levels, should be considered in this analysis (Saurugger & Radaelli, 2008). Mainstream literature on public policies recognizes the importance of leadership and institutional environment (Cardoza et al., 2015), administrative capacity (Lindstrom, 2021; Potluka & Medeiros, 2021), and socioeconomic status (Shao et al., 2021), among other contexts, which determine the degree of their successful implementation. In this chapter, however, the methodological approach draws mostly on desk research and on available scientific literature, as well as the reading of official EU documents. The three following sections organize the research. The next discusses the relation and contribution of EU strategic development agendas to the EU policy goal of territorial cohesion. The third section elaborates on the strategies of EU Cohesion Policy frameworks to effectively (or not) promote territorial cohesion policies at the EU and national levels. The subsequent chapter highlights the role of the three EU territorial agendas to implement territorial cohesion policies. Finally, the last section concludes the analysis.

## 2. EU strategic development agendas and territorial cohesion

The European integration project started in 1957 with a strong economic and market liberalisation rationale. However, the Treaty of Rome, signed in the same year, already recognised the need for a harmonious development of economic activities, which can be regarded as a starting point for a EU territorial cohesion policy goal (Colomb & Santinha, 2014). Indeed, as a policy and political concept, territorial cohesion has been in the EU policy agenda for many decades and has gained prominence since the 1990s as a set of principles for a more balanced, harmonious, sustainable and efficient territorial development of the EU (Clifton et al., 2016). This basic policy rationale has evolved gradually in EU documents, and the academic discourse, as Zaucha & Böhme, (2020) uphold, in which notions and policy goals such as territorial governance, territorial cooperation, territorial integration, spatial planning, territorial resiliency, and territorial sustainability are associated with territorial cohesion policies.

It is crucial to point out, however, that the notion of territorial cohesion only appeared in EU documents in 2001, in the Second Cohesion Report (EC, 2001a), and later on the Third

Cohesion Report (EC, 2004). This was largely influenced by the previous publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (EC, 1999), which invoked the need for an harmonious and balanced development of the Union as a whole (Janin Rivolin, 2005), and by the French '*Aménagement du territoire*' spatial planning approach (Faludi, 2004).

In formal terms, however, the policy goal of territorial cohesion was only included in a key EU policy goal in the Treaty of Lisbon, which was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2009 (Colomb & Santinha, 2014). In the meantime (2008), the only EU key document on territorial cohesion was published as the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (EC, 2008a), amid overall EU member states' intention to stimulate discussion, with the hope of some form of consensus emerging (Faludi, 2013). But as Chamusca et al. (2022) conclude, many references to the territorial dimension of EU policies are commonly mentioned in several European documents, before and after the publication of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. Even so, in normative terms, this paper embraces several policy areas which are seen to be critical in materializing territorial cohesion processes, including concentration, connectivity and cooperation policy goals (EC, 2008a).

While the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas clearly neglected the territorial dimension of EU policies, for Chamusca et al. (2022), ten years later (2010), the Europe 2020 strategy end up reinforcing the territorial cohesion dimension of EU policies. It incorporated the notion of territorial cohesion in its text, as well as a functional and multi-level governance and a place-based approach for implementing EU policies. In tandem, the same authors claim that the EU Agenda 2030, adopted in late 2020, recognizes the need to foster an EU territorial cohesion action-oriented framework via a place-based approach.

Table 1 presents a summary of the relation between the post-2000 EU mainstream strategic development agendas and their relationship with territorial cohesion crucial components. Starting with the EU Lisbon Strategy, which was launched in March 2000 with the main goal of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (EP, 2010), it is immediately evident that it follows a socioeconomic-centric vision of development for the EU, with no mention of sustainably based and balance-based development approaches. In view of this, in the following year (2001) the EU Gothenburg Strategy complemented the Lisbon Strategy policy goals by highlighting the need for a sustainable development approach, since "economic growth,

social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand” (EC, 2001b: 2). As seen, some key territorial cohesion policy domains such as territorial governance, polycentrism and territorial cooperation (see Medeiros 2016b) were not highlighted as paramount development arenas in these strategies.

Table 1. Mainstream EU development strategies/agendas since 2000

| Strategy/Agenda       | Main Goals   | Related Components of Territorial Cohesion   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Lisbon - 2000         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society by better policies for the information society and R&amp;D, as well as by stepping up the process of structural reform for competitiveness and innovation and by completing the internal market;</li> <li>2. Modernising the European social model, investing in people and combating social exclusion;</li> <li>3. Sustaining the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects by applying an appropriate macro-economic policy mix.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic Competitiveness</li> <li>- Social cohesion</li> </ul>  |
| Gothenburg - 2001     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic growth</li> <li>2. Social inclusion</li> <li>3. Environmental protection</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability</li> </ul> |
| Lisbon revised - 2005 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Investing more in knowledge and innovation</li> <li>2. Unlocking business potential, especially for SMEs</li> <li>3. Increasing employment opportunities for priority categories</li> <li>4. Climate change and energy policy for Europe</li> </ol>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability</li> </ul> |
| Europe 2020 - 2010    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.</li> <li>2. Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.</li> <li>3. Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability</li> </ul> |
| EC 2019-2024 - 2019   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A European Green Deal</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic innovation</li> </ul>  |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. A Europe fit for the digital age</li> <li>3. An economy that works for people</li> <li>4. A stronger Europe in the world</li> <li>5. Promoting our European way of life</li> <li>6. A new push for European democracy</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Environmental sustainability</li> <li>- Democracy</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

In 2005, a revised Lisbon Strategy was released with a new set of integrated guidelines and specific areas for priority actions, which continue to be supported by the mainstream development triad, economy + society + environment, although with an increased focus on growth and jobs via a three-year policy cycle (EC, 2005). In 2010, a ten-year EU strategy named Europe 2020 replaced the Lisbon Strategy. Then again, the economic centric growth policy rationale guided its main goals. Curiously, the goal of territorial cohesion appeared in these goals for the first time but was linked to the goal of ‘inclusive growth’ to ensure that “the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society” (EC, 2010: 4). Further on, this strategy reveals that “it is also essential that the benefits of economic growth spread to all parts of the Union, including its outermost regions, thus strengthening territorial cohesion” (EC, 2010: 20). It is not surprising that territorial cohesion is included in this strategy since it was included in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 as a main EU policy goal, alongside economic and social cohesion. This justifies the Europe 2020 intention that “economic, social and territorial cohesion will remain at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy to ensure that all energies and capacities are mobilised and focused on the pursuit of the strategy's priorities. Cohesion policy and its structural funds, while important in their own right, are key delivery mechanisms to achieve the priorities of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in member states and regions” (EC, 2010: 20). As seen, in general terms, territorial cohesion is viewed by the Europe 2020 strategy as a mere policy accessory to social inclusion, and EU Cohesion Policy a critical policy tool to materialize this policy goal via the support to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. On a positive note, the delivery of a stronger governance process is invoked by the Europe 2020 strategy; however, no mention is made of the need for a more balanced, polycentric and harmonious territory, nor for the support for European territorial cooperation processes.

For the period 2019–2024, the EC proposed six main development priorities, topped by the European Green Deal, with the goal of transforming the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy by ensuring: (i) no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050; (ii) economic growth decoupled from resource use; and (iii) that no person and no place be left behind. This later

component clearly has a character of territorial cohesion. However, this Green Deal does not make a single mention of the need to foster a more cohesive and balanced territory. Even so, it mentions that “the urban dimension of cohesion policy will be strengthened, and the proposed European Urban Initiative will provide assistance to cities to help them make best use of opportunities to develop sustainable urban development strategies” (EC, 2019: 23).

### 3. EU Cohesion Policy and territorial cohesion

As the name indicates, EU Cohesion Policy was forged with the intention of promoting a more cohesive EU territory (Medeiros, 2017b), and ultimately territorial cohesion trends (MOLLE 2007). Since territorial cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept (Garau et al., 2020; Medeiros, 2017b), this goal can be achieved in a myriad of ways. For, Chamusca et al. (2022), for instance, EU Cohesion Policy has played a critical role in promoting more balanced territorial development and strengthening a culture of spatial planning.

In simple terms, EU Cohesion Policy is the main EU policy tool for achieving territorial cohesion trends, by means of its various funds: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund (CF) (see Rauhut & Costa, 2021). Indeed, it has become commonplace to recognize EU Cohesion Policy as a cornerstone EU Policy for addressing territorial development in the EU, not only because of its financial package (representing a third of the EU budget), but also because it benefits all EU regions, one way or the other (Crescenzi & Giua, 2020). Concerning the latter factor, the systematic enlargement process of the EU towards the east has increased territorial development imbalances and has placed more challenges to EU Cohesion Policy as the main instrument of addressing EU regional inequalities (Madanipour, 2021).

Despite the many metamorphoses suffered by EU Cohesion Policy over the past decades to adapt to new policy and development contexts (Medeiros, 2014, 2017), it is still deemed to act as a mechanism of redistribution and solidarity (Crescenzi et al., 2020). Clearly conceived from the outset as a distributive instrument to improve the economic performances of the less developed regions, Cohesion Policy allocation of funding has been aligned by economic indicators such as such as GDP per capita (Vinci, 2021). From a strategic design standpoint, however, several changes have been implemented over the several passing programming periods (Medeiros, 2020c).

For instance, in the last programming period (2014–2020), increasing attention was given to integrated sustainable urban development by EU Cohesion Policy, not only because it embraces a green policy rationale, which is globally acknowledged as the only viable path for preserving the planet and our species (Sachs, 2015), but also because of the increasing importance of urban areas in Europe and the world as engines of development and attractive places to live (UN, 2020). Moreover, the policy integration rationale offers a range of more effective solutions for policy implementation, especially relevant in the context of urban development and planning policies (Medeiros & van der Zwet, 2020a; 2020b; Mendez et al., 2021).

Curiously, or not, Gagliardi & Percoco (2017: 856) reveal the importance of urban areas in translating positive development impacts of EU Cohesion Policy, as well as rural areas close to cities, which have “benefitted most from the growing opportunities created by the policy by accommodating the increasing demand for available space in the surroundings of main urban agglomerates”. Likewise, Bachtrögler et al. (2020) conclude that these impacts tend to be larger in relatively poor countries, which can justify territorial cohesion trends at the EU level in past years (Medeiros, 2016b). Conversely, others argue that territorial cohesion policies are often defined and shaped by the institutions involved (Faludi, 2016), and are where the principle of subsidiarity is effectively implemented (Moodie et al., 2021).

In our view, however, for the current programming period (2021–2027), the proposed five policy objectives of EU Cohesion Policy (see Table 2) are, for the first time, closely aligned with the main dimensions of territorial cohesion (see Medeiros, 2016b). Firstly, the goal towards a more competitive and smarter Europe is related with a dimension of economic competitiveness, which has always been present in all main objectives of EU Cohesion Policy programming periods. The support for social inclusiveness, as yet another critical dimension of territorial cohesion, is also present in the current and previous EU Cohesion Policy phases. What is new since the 2014–2020 programming period is the identification of specific main policy goals towards supporting environmental sustainability. Moreover, since 2007, European territorial cooperation has become a central EU Cohesion Policy goal, following three phases of the Interreg community initiative (Medeiros, 2008a: 2008b).

In almost every way, the 2014–2020 phase of EU Cohesion Policy also brought to the fore the need for investment in territorial governance-related components, like support for improved administrative capacity of public administration (Bachtler et al., 2014). Indeed, until 2006, the main

policy goals of EU Cohesion Policy were concentrated on promoting socioeconomic cohesion in EU territories. It is true that several EU community initiatives (Table 3) with more targeted policy intervention goals like the Interreg community initiative (EC, 1990) complemented this overarching EU policy goal in specific policy areas. Since 2021, however, a manifested separate priority of EU Cohesion Policy was directed towards promoting a more connected Europe, a policy goal which is clearly related to the morphologic polycentricity dimension of territorial cohesion. In sum, the evolution of all the main policy goals of EU Cohesion Policy in all its phases have evolved towards a more comprehensive set of policy objectives covering all the main conceptual dimensions of territorial cohesion from a policy strategy standpoint. This is, in our view, a positive sign in which the realization that support for socioeconomic and environmental sustainability projects needs to be complemented with territorial governance and cooperation related projects, as well as with increasing territorial connectivity and integration. Ultimately, the ‘territoriality’ (Medeiros 2020b) character of EU Cohesion Policy has increased with each phase, thus building momentum for an increased contribution to a more cohesive EU territory, at least from a policy strategy standpoint.

Table 2. EU Cohesion Policy phases and main goals

| Phase     | Main Goals   | Related Components of Territorial Cohesion   |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1989-1993 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind;</li> <li>2. Converting regions seriously affected by industrial decline;</li> <li>3. Combating long-term unemployment;</li> <li>4. Facilitating the occupational integration of young people;</li> <li>5. (a) Speeding up the adjustment of agricultural structures and (b) promoting the development of rural areas.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> </ul> |
| 1994-1999 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind;</li> <li>1. Converting regions or parts of regions seriously affected by industrial decline;</li> <li>3. Combating long-term unemployment</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> </ul> |

|           |  |   |
|-----------|--|---|
|           | <p>and facilitating the integration into working life of young people and of persons exposed to exclusion from the labour market, promotion of equal employment opportunities for men and women;</p> <p>4. Facilitating adaptation of workers to industrial changes and to changes in production systems;</p> <p>5. Promoting rural development by (a) speeding up the adjustment of agricultural structures in the framework of reform of common agricultural policy and promoting the modernisation and structural adjustment of the fisheries sector, (b) facilitating the development and structural adjustment of rural areas;</p> <p>6. Development and structural adjustment of regions with an extremely low population density (as of 1 January 1995)</p> |   |
| 2000-2006 | <p>1. Promoting the development and structural adjustment of regions whose development is lagging behind;</p> <p>2. Supporting the economic and social conversion of areas facing structural difficulties, hereinafter; and</p> <p>3. Objective 3: supporting the adaptation and modernisation of policies and systems of education, training and employment</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> </ul>                                    |
| 2007-2013 | <p>1. Convergence: aims at speeding up the convergence of the least-developed Member States and regions defined by GDP per capital of less than 75 % of the EU average;</p> <p>2. Regional Competitiveness and Employment: covers all other EU regions with the aim of strengthening regions' competitiveness and attractiveness as well as employment; and</p> <p>3. European Territorial Cooperation: based on the Interreg initiative, support is available for cross-border,</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Territorial Cooperation</li> </ul> |

|           |   |  |
|-----------|---|--|
|           | transnational and interregional cooperation as well as for networks.  |  |
| 2014-2020 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation</li> <li>2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, information and communication technologies</li> <li>3. Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs</li> <li>4. Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy</li> <li>5. Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management</li> <li>6. Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency</li> <li>7. Promoting sustainable transport and improving network infrastructures</li> <li>8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility</li> <li>9. Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination</li> <li>10. Investing in education, training and lifelong learning</li> <li>11. Improving the efficiency of public administration</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Territorial Cooperation</li> <li>- Territorial Governance</li> <li>- Environmental Sustainability</li> <li>- Territorial Integration</li> </ul>                                     |
| 2021-2027 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A more competitive and smarter Europe</li> <li>2. A greener, low-carbon transitioning towards a net zero carbon economy</li> <li>3. A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility</li> <li>4. A more social and inclusive Europe</li> <li>5. A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic competitiveness</li> <li>- Social inclusion</li> <li>- Territorial Cooperation</li> <li>- Territorial Governance</li> <li>- Environmental Sustainability</li> <li>- Territorial Integration</li> <li>- Territorial Connectivity</li> </ul> |

Source: Own elaboration based on: (EC, 1996; 2007; 2008b; 2010; 2014; 2017; 2022).

Table 3. Community Initiatives for the Period 1989-1993

| Name                      | Goal  | Million Euros |
|---------------------------|---|---------------|
| <b>INTERREG 1990-1993</b> | Promoting the cooperation among border regions and revitalizing those areas located at the furthest borders of the Community. | 800           |

|                                 |   |     |
|---------------------------------|---|-----|
| <b>NOW<br/>1990-1993</b>        | Focusing on women who should take advantage of the equal opportunities in the field of employment and vocational training.  | 120 |
| <b>HORIZON<br/>1990-1993</b>    | Promoting the economic, professional and social integration of the disabled people and certain underprivileged groups.  | 180 |
| <b>LEADER<br/>1991-1993</b>     | Promoting the implementation of innovative solutions for the rural development.   | 400 |
| <b>STRIDE<br/>1990-1993</b>     | Strengthening the innovative capacity and the technological development.  | 400 |
| <b>RECHAR<br/>1989-1993</b>     | Diversifying the economic activities of the coalfields, promoting the creation of new activities, the development of those already existing, the improvement of the environment and the support to the vocational training. | 300 |
| <b>ENVIREG<br/>1990-1993</b>    | Promoting the improvement of the environment and the economic development of the less developed regions.  | 500 |
| <b>KONVER<br/>1993</b>          | Promoting the economic diversification of those regions depending of the defence sector.  | 130 |
| <b>REGIS<br/>1990-1993</b>      | Intensifying the PCs in favour of the ultra- peripheral regions to promote the adaptation of their economy to the Single Market.  | 200 |
| <b>RETEX<br/>1992-1993</b>      | Economic diversification of the areas depending on the textile sector and the dress –making.  | 100 |
| <b>PRISMA<br/>1991-1993</b>     | Helping the companies of the less privileged areas to take advantage of the creation of the single market through the improvement of certain infrastructures and services.  | 100 |
| <b>REGEN<br/>1990-1993</b>      | Facilitating the piping of natural gas and electricity in the less developed regions.   | 300 |
| <b>TELEMÁTICA<br/>1990-1993</b> | Promoting the use of advanced telecommunication services in the less favoured regions.  | 200 |
| <b>EUROFORM<br/>1990-1993</b>   | Developing new qualifications, skills and employment opportunities to promote their convergence on a community scale.   | 300 |

Source: own elaboration based on European Commission.

#### 4. EU territorial agendas and territorial cohesion

The EU territorial agendas result, in our view, from the realisation that EU mainstream development strategies largely neglected the territorial dimension of EU policies (see Medeiros, 2016a; 2017a; 2020a). Here, for instance, the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agendas were respectively focused on socioeconomic and sustainability agendas (Colomb & Santinha, 2014), with no particular regard for a territorial cohesion rationale or even a policy vision for territoriality (Medeiros, 2020b). In this context, the introduction of the first territorial agenda in 2007 (TA, 2007) was considered a crucial step in consolidating territorial cohesion as a key policy goal and, according to Nosek (2017), it highlighted the important role of spatial planning and sustainability in implementing EU policies. Crucially, despite all the EU strategic attempts to translate territorial cohesion into policy actions (Demeterova et al., 2020) or coherent policy packages, taking account

of where policies take effect (Faludi, 2013) towards more balanced and harmonious territory territorial cohesion trends at the national level, have not yet been achieved in all analysed member-states (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020).

This first territorial agenda was profoundly preconditioned and influenced by the previously mentioned ESDP (Monzon et al., 2019), which reflects a polycentric development rationale, as well as the support for transnational spatial development strategies for the European territory (Faludi, 2006). For Asprogerakas & Zachari (2020: 583), this polycentrism-centred rationale of the ESDP reveals the “role and importance of the urban poles and their connection in order to bring spatial development, irrespective of the size of the relevant spatial geographical entity”.

Instead, the second territorial agenda was revealed one year after the adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy, to put “forward an ambitious strategy, though specifically attributed to EU territorial development” (Zaucha et al., 2014: 250), since “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, 2011: 3). Another pressing policy goal advanced during the negotiations of the second TA was the need to increase the coordination of EU policies to achieve greater policy coherence as well as the requirement to improve analysis and territorial-data collection for evidence-based policy-making (Van Well, 2012).

By late 2019, the third territorial agenda was approved (TA, 2019), with a view to providing orientation for strategic spatial planning and the strengthening of the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels. With the aim of providing an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe (TA, 2019) this renewed territorial agenda seeks an inclusive and sustainable future for all European places and the achievements of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2016) in Europe. In essence, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is supported by two main policy goals: (i) a just Europe that offers future perspectives for all places and people via better-balanced territorial development utilising Europe’s diversity + a convergent local and regional development, less inequality between places + easier living and working across national borders; and (ii) a green Europe that protects common livelihoods and shapes societal transition via better ecological livelihoods, climate-neutral and resilient towns, cities and regions + strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world + sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places.

As can be seen in Table 4, the first territorial agenda was strongly influenced by the ESDP in placing the goal of promoting a polycentric territory of the EU at the heart of its agenda. Instead, the following territorial agendas soon gave rise to the broader policy goal of territorial cohesion as their main strategic policy priority goal. Certainly, all the three territorial agendas advance concrete policy measures for promoting territorial cohesion trends in Europe, thus complementing ongoing EU mainstream territorial development strategies. What is striking is the attempt to simplify the policy message in the current (2030) territorial agenda by defining two main clear goals, with a social and environmental character (TA, 2019). This was mostly due to the recognition that the message from the previous territorial agendas had a hard time being passed to policymakers all around Europe, probably due to the excessive and confusing number of policy messages. Despite this simplification, in our opinion, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is able to focus on crucial policy domains towards a more cohesive Europe, including the need to reinforce functional regions, territorial integration and connectivity at various territorial levels, and environmental sustainability via a circular economy.

Table 4. Territorial Agendas strategic rationale and Territorial Cohesion

|                                | TA 2007   | TA 2011  | TA 2030   |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Main theme                     | - Towards a more <b>competitive</b> and <b>sustainable</b> Europe of diverse regions  | - Towards an <b>inclusive, smart and sustainable</b> Europe of diverse regions   | - A future for <b>all places</b>  |
| Main goal                      | - Promote a <b>polycentric territory</b> of the EU  | - Support <b>territorial cohesion</b> in Europe  | - Promote <b>territorial cohesion</b> in Europe.  |
| Territorial cohesion rationale | - Promote <b>polycentric</b> development<br>- Secure better living conditions and <b>quality of life</b><br>- Promote <b>territorial governance</b> | - Better integrate territorial cohesion into <b>cohesion policy</b><br>- Promote a <b>place-based approach</b><br>- Promote <b>integrated functional area</b> development<br>- Promote a <b>multilevel governance</b> approach<br>- Promote <b>sustainable</b> and efficient use of <b>territory</b> and resources | - Promoting <b>balanced and harmonious territorial development</b> between and within countries, regions, cities and municipalities<br>- Ensuring a <b>future for all places</b> and people in Europe, building on the diversity of places and <b>subsidiarity</b> ;<br>- Promote an <b>inclusive and sustainable future</b> for all places |

|  |  |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Priorities for territorial development and cohesion</p> | <p>1 - Strengthen <b>polycentric</b> development and innovation through networking of city regions and cities.<br/> 2 - New forms of partnership and <b>territorial governance</b> between rural and urban areas<br/> 3 - Promote <b>regional clusters</b> of competition and innovation in Europe<br/> 4 - Strengthening and extension of <b>trans-European networks</b><br/> 5 - Promote trans-European <b>risk management</b><br/> 6 - Strengthening <b>ecological</b> structures and <b>cultural</b> resources</p> | <p>1. Promote <b>polycentric</b> and balanced territorial development<br/> 2. Encouraging <b>integrated development</b> in cities, rural and specific regions<br/> 3. Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational <b>functional regions</b><br/> 4. Ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on <b>strong local economies</b><br/> 5. Improving <b>territorial connectivity</b> for individuals, communities and enterprises<br/> 6. Managing and connecting <b>ecological</b>, landscape and <b>cultural</b> values of regions</p> | <p>1 Promote a <b>Just Europe</b>: Balanced Europe - Functional Regions; and Integration beyond Borders<br/><br/> 2. A <b>Green Europe</b>: Healthy Environment; Circular Economy; and Sustainable Connections</p> |
|--|--|---|--|

Source: Own elaboration based on: (Medeiros, 2019; TA, 2007; 2011; 2019).

## 5. Conclusion

Territorial cohesion is essentially an EU policy goal that was formalised in the EU Treaty in 2009. However, as seen in the analysis presented, the analysed (post 2000) EU mainstream strategic development agendas have always retained the prevailing vision of global development centred on the need to foster economic competitiveness and social inclusion, often complemented with the need to support policy actions related to environmental sustainability. Hence, it is not difficult to conclude that, in overall terms, the EU has never truly adopted a vision of territorial cohesion for its development agendas. Even in the current (2019–2024) EU development vision, territorial cohesion is not given a specific strategy package alike the EU Green Deal, which specifically targets the domain of environmental sustainability.

The lack of strong and effective engagement from the EU in promoting a vision of territorial cohesion development has prompted a range of initiatives to counterbalance the EU prevailing policy focus on socioeconomic + environmental policy actions. One of the most visible initiatives to elevate the importance of territorial cohesion as a EU mainstream public policy was the publication of the three territorial agendas, all of them clearly addressing the need to promote a

more polycentric, balanced, harmonious, integrated and cohesive EU territory, as a strategic development policy backbone. It is still debatable how successful the current (TA 2030) territorial agenda will be in permeating national and EU discourses and policy strategy lenses based on a territorial cohesion development rationale. What looks crystal clear is the relative failure in this attempt from the first two territorial agendas, at least in a more practical manner.

Another useful starting point in this debate is to invoke the importance of EU Cohesion Policy, which is the most financed EU policy, as a crucial and practical public policy instrument to foster territorial cohesion processes. However, a closer look at its main policy objectives over its six programming periods leads us to conclude that, from a strategic standpoint, this policy has, for the most part, supported projects aiming at promoting socioeconomic cohesion and environmental sustainability. Even so, EU Cohesion Policy was crucial to ignite and robust territorial cooperation (mostly cross-border and transnational) processes, and more recently territorial governance processes (mostly administrative capacity related projects). Moreover, many EU member states have used EU Cohesion Policy to modernise territorial connectivity-related infrastructures, thus contributing support for some components of the morphologic polycentrism dimension of territorial cohesion, if one understands this concept as: “the process of promoting a more cohesive and balanced territory, by: (i) supporting the reduction of socioeconomic territorial imbalances; (ii) promoting environmental sustainability; (iii) reinforcing and improving the territorial cooperation/governance processes; and (iv) reinforcing and establishing a more polycentric urban system” (Medeiros, 2016b: 10).

In conclusion, despite being formally expressed in the EU Treaty as a key EU policy goal, territorial cohesion has left a strong imprint on EU mainstream development agendas. Also, the exact ramification and influence of EU Cohesion Policy in promoting a more balanced and cohesive EU territory can be verified in certain policy areas at the EU level, but not at the national level, where territorial exclusion trends continue to prevail in several analysed EU member states (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020). How far can the current territorial agenda (2030) contribute to shifting EU and national public policies towards the implementation of territorial cohesion policies is debatable and subject to further analysis. On a positive note, the current EU Cohesion Policy programming period is, more than ever, strategically aligned with a strategic vision of territorial cohesion, which includes the intention to support critical components of territorial cohesion public policies, like territorial connectivity and integration, as well as territorial cooperation, governance

and the mainstream development triad: economic competitiveness, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Then again, only a few years from now can evidence be provided of whether this more comprehensive and holistic strategic vision for EU Cohesion Policy was effectively translated into a more cohesive EU territory at various territorial levels.

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