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European spatial development policy



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As part of the European spatial development policy, the ministers of the EU member states responsible for spatial development coordinate spatially relevant decisions with each other and with the European Commission. They agree on strategic papers, cooperate with sectoral policies, are supported by research and implement elements of their policies in European cooperation programmes.

1 Definition and demarcation: What is European spatial development policy?

In European spatial development policy, the ministers of the EU member states responsible for ▷ *Spatial development* work together and agree on spatially relevant decisions, both among each other and with the European Commission. This is done both from a vertical perspective of formulating and coordinating policies between the (▷ *European Union*) and the EU member states, as well as the European cities and regions, and in a horizontal dialogue between spatial development policy and spatially relevant sectoral policies. Accordingly, the goal of European spatial development policy is the vertical and horizontal coordination of European, national and regional or local policy fields with the aim of achieving a coherent impact across European territory.

The essential foundation of European spatial development policy under EU law, as for European policy in general, is the EU Treaty, more specifically the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The current version of the EU Treaty (Treaty of Lisbon, cf. European Parliament 2010), which entered into force at the end of 2009 reflects the political discussions and intergovernmental activities of the preceding two decades on the need for a European spatial development policy to the extent that territorial cohesion, in addition to economic and social cohesion, has been included in the Treaty as a new objective of the European Union. The pursuit of the goal of further strengthening the territorial cohesion across the European space is, as regulated by the Treaty, a joint responsibility of the European Commission and the EU member states and is thus subject – in the legal terminology of the EU Treaties – to their shared competence (▷ *Territorial cohesion*).

Thus European spatial development policy takes place both within the EU and also between the member states (intergovernmental) according to their operational and legal *modi operandi* (collectively) as well as based on bilateral and multilateral agreements.

2 Cooperation between EU member states in the field of spatial development

European spatial development policy has continuously developed, at first within the framework of the Council of Europe, and since about 1990 also within the EU context, and has thus created new focal points in a constant interplay between European challenges, policies and programmes.

2.1 Regional/Spatial Development Charter of the Council of Europe

The European spatial development policy within the European Union was established about 25 years ago, when the European Commission, initially at the end of 1980s, and then later also the EU member states, understood the need for a better alignment between spatially relevant policies and programmes. Previously, European spatial development policy did not have an institutionalised role within the EU. The Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT), on the other hand, has addressed issues of European spatial

development policy since 1970, thus long before the European Union, and in so doing dealt with issues and adopted resolutions, some of which are still topical today as important tasks of European integration to be completed (for example, the creation of a uniform, comparable information framework by establishing European spatial observation). An important milestone of this work was the adoption of the European Regional/Spatial Development Charter of Torremolinos in 1983 (CEMAT 1983). The cooperation within the framework of the Council of Europe (with its 47 current European member states, among them the 28 EU member states) and CEMAT continues, but the focus of cooperation in matters of spatial development policy has clearly shifted – not least due to the eastward enlargement – in the direction of the European Union.

2.2 ESDP: The political basis of European spatial development policy

The most important project of the 1990s in the area of European spatial development policy was the joint elaboration of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (cf. European Commission 1999). The political foundations of European spatial development policy were defined during this elaboration process, and the – then still 15 – member states of the European Union agreed on an essentially intergovernmental approach to policymaking.

The ESDP refers back to the objective of the EU Treaty (at that time the EU Treaty of Amsterdam) to bring about a balanced and sustainable development of the European Union and interprets this objective from the perspective of spatial development. The focus of this spatial perspective is particularly on reconciling the different demands made on ▷ *Space* (economical, social, ecological, cultural) and contributing to sustainable, large-scale, balanced spatial development. The need for action has been demonstrated by the ESDP in extensive analyses on the economic imbalances and spatial disparities, the continuing high levels of unemployment, in particular youth unemployment, in some regions of Europe, environmental problems and the pressure brought to bear on the natural and cultural heritage of Europe. To illustrate and exemplify the economic imbalances in Europe, the ESDP uses the European pentagon, which comprises an area amounting to 20% of the (then) EU territory, formed by the metropolitan areas of London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg as cornerstones, within which 50% of the economic output is generated (cf. Schön 2000).

The ESDP strives to counter these spatial imbalances with the vision of sustainable, spatially balanced, polycentric European spatial development (▷ *Sustainability*; ▷ *Disparities, spatial*; ▷ *Polycentricity*). However, the ESDP is not merely a political statement of intent. It also addresses the need to significantly improve the knowledge base concerning the structure and development of space in Europe; moreover, common programmes to implement the objectives of the ESDP were already initiated when the ESDP was formulated. The ESPON research programme resulted from the former, while the latter gave rise to the Interreg cooperation programme.

2.3 TAEU: The Territorial Agenda of the European Union

The EU Treaty of Lisbon formally entered into force at the end of 2009, although its content had already been established and adopted in 2007. Although the Treaty of Lisbon does not contain any new aspects in regard to European spatial development policy as such, it introduces a new, general objective of the European Union: to enhance territorial cohesion among EU countries.

Territorial cohesion is thus on a par with the goal of enhancing economic and social cohesion. This also shows quite clearly that all EU policies, and European spatial development policy in particular, must be committed to this new goal of strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe and that the European Commission is given a new role and contractual basis in the pursuit of this goal.

In their expert legal opinion on the European policy of territorial cohesion, Battis and Kersten developed three dimensions of the term and concept of territorial cohesion. The authors point out that the first dimension of territorial cohesion aims at the territorial compensation of development disparities. The second dimension requires the territorial integration of all spatially relevant sectoral policies into the European multi-level system. The third dimension is a focus on territorial governance, i.e. on interaction and networking between all European spatial stakeholders¹ (Battis/Kersten 2008: 60).

Given the new EU Treaty, the need to clarify the legal and political relationship between European spatial development policy (mostly at member state level) and the new, shared competence for the strengthening of territorial cohesion in Europe was a key motivation for the European ministers for spatial development to adopt a Territorial Agenda of the European Union in 2007 based on the ESDP (cf. *BMUB* [Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety] 2007). Furthermore, the ESDP strategy document is to be accompanied by an agenda with a stronger focus on action. Following the accession of first ten (in 2004), then two (in 2007) central and eastern European states, there was an additional motivation to give the ESDP, which was adopted by 15 member states, a broader basis of legitimacy for what was now 27 EU member states.

2.4 TA 2020: Implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy in the European space

After the revision and reissue of the Lisbon Strategy by means of the Europe 2020 growth and development strategy, in 2011 the European ministers responsible for spatial development addressed the question of how the growth targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy could be combined with the balancing goals of territorial cohesion and how European spatial development policy could make a contribution in this regard. These discussions ended, as agreed in principle already in 2007, in a revision and update of the Territorial Agenda (TAEU) and gave rise in 2011 to the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA 2020) under Hungary's EU Council Presidency (cf. Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning 2011).

As was the TAEU, the TA 2020 is based on an analytical expert report on the 'Territorial State and Perspectives of the European Union' (Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning 2011: 2). The TA 2020 pursues the aim of strengthening territorial cohesion in Europe, 'fostering integration of the territorial dimension in different policies [...] and to ensure implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy according to territorial cohesion principles. [...]

We believe that the objectives of the EU defined in the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth can only be achieved if the territorial dimension of the strategy is taken into

¹ „Die erste Dimension des territorialen Zusammenhalts ist auf den territorialen Ausgleich von Entwicklungsunterschieden gerichtet. [...] Die zweite Dimension des territorialen Zusammenhalts fordert die territoriale Integration aller raumbedeutsamen Fachpolitiken im europäischen Mehrebenensystem. [...] Die dritte Dimension des territorialen Zusammenhalts zielt auf territoriale Governance, also die Vernetzung aller europäischen Raumakteure“

account' (Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning 2011: 2). To further specify the goals, the TA 2020 defines 'six territorial priorities for the EU which can contribute to the successful implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy' (Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning 2011: 7 et seq.):

- 1) Strengthening polycentric, balanced spatial development
- 2) Strengthening integrated development in cities, rural areas and special regions
- 3) Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions
- 4) Ensuring the global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies
- 5) Improving territorial connections for individuals, communities and enterprises
- 6) Managing and linking up the ecological, landscape and cultural assets of regions

In accordance with its character of a political agenda, the governance and implementation mechanisms of the TA 2020 are outlined at different levels of competence: EU, transnational and national. Among the most important instruments are monitoring and research (ESPON) (▷ *Spatial observation*), cooperation among regional stakeholders (Interreg, macro-regions) (▷ *Cooperation, transnational*), integrated spatial impact assessments (▷ *Spatial impact*) and the coordination of sectoral policies (▷ *Spatially-relevant sectoral planning*), testing of new legal forms (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation – EGTC) and integrated maritime spatial planning (▷ *Maritime spatial planning [Raumordnung]*) (cf. Schön/Selke 2007). To support and continuously monitor the implementation, a Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP) was established.

3 Instruments of European spatial development policy

3.1 ESPON: European spatial observation

The European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) goes back to an initiative of the European ministers responsible for spatial planning, which had its origins already in the meeting of ministers from Leipzig in 1994, and is closely linked to the European spatial development policy as supported by the member states and the joint elaboration of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). In this process it became clear at an early stage that a European spatial development policy based on cooperation should be supported by the appropriate research infrastructure (▷ *Spatial sciences*). 'In the opinion of the ministers, cooperation between member states in the field of spatial planning policy presupposes that the policy-advising spatial research institutes in Europe work more closely together. Based on a submission of the German Presidency, they recommended the establishment of a European network of the relevant research institutions in the form of a European observatory'² (*BMBau* [Federal Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Urban Design] 1994: 1, point 4).

2 „Mitgliedstaatliche Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Raumordnungspolitik setzt nach Auffassung der Ministerinnen und Minister voraus, dass auch die politikberatenden raumwissenschaftlichen Forschungsinstitute in Europa enger zusammenarbeiten. Gestützt auf eine Vorlage der deutschen Präsidentschaft empfahlen sie den Aufbau eines europäischen Netzwerkes der entsprechenden Forschungseinrichtungen in Form eines europäischen Observatoriums“

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ESPON has been in place in its current form since 2002. The current ESPON 2020 programme builds on the two preceding ESPON 2006 and ESPON 2013 programmes and runs from 2014 to 2020. The aim of ESPON 2020 is to develop the previously established European Territorial Observatory Network in order to make pan-European, comparable, systematic and reliable know-how available and to assist in applying it in policymaking.

The ESPON 2020 programme has an overall budget of €48.6 million, €41.3 million of which is provided by the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) (▷ *European regional policy*). It comprises the 28 EU member states as well as the neighbouring states of Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein. ESPON focuses on Europe-wide research projects, which are conducted by transnational research teams. ESPON is organised in the legal form of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Based on regional statistical analyses and information on spatial development in the European Union, it provides advice to the European Commission and governments of the member states. This Europe-wide, comprehensive approach is supplemented by targeted applications and in-depth studies (targeted analyses) of results and methods in select model regions. The interaction between policymaking and science, and of the European and national level is supported by a network of national contact points (ESPON Contact Points). In Germany, the Federal Institute for Building, Urban and Spatial Research (*Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung, BBSR*) is the national ESPON contact point.

3.2 Interreg: Transnational cooperation

Likewise, the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), previously known under the abbreviation Interreg, is part of the structural and investment policy of the European Union. This policy has supported cross-border cooperation between regions and cities for more than 20 years at three different levels:

- Interreg A (cross-border cooperation): further development of economic and social cooperation in neighbouring border regions (▷ *Cooperation, cross-border*)
- Interreg B (transnational cooperation): cooperation between national, regional and municipal partners in transnational cooperation areas to enhance territorial integration in these areas
- Interreg C (interregional cooperation): cooperation networks and sharing experience to improve the efficiency of existing instruments for regional development and cohesion

A total of approximately €10 billion of European funds from the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) is available for the current ETC programme (Interreg V) for the programme period from 2014 to 2020. Of this amount, €6.6 billion is earmarked for the 60 programme areas of the Interreg A strand, €2.1 billion for the 15 programme areas of the Interreg B strand, and €0.5 billion for the four programmes of the Interreg C (Interreg Europe, URBACT, Interact, ESPON) strand, as well as €0.9 billion for the neighbourhood programme (IPA and ENI).

The Interreg B programme, which supports transnational cooperation, is of particular importance for European spatial development policy. Germany is involved in six Interreg B programmes. In five of these programmes –in the Alpine region, in central Europe, in the North Sea area, in northwestern Europe and in the Baltic Sea area –, the current cooperation can rely on

the experience and results of the past funding periods; the new programme for the Danube area also aims to support the corresponding macro-regional strategy.

The elaboration and implementation of macro-regional strategies for the Baltic Sea and the Danube area of 2009 and 2011 are novel policy approaches at the European level. In the meantime, the heads of state and government of the EU have decided to elaborate two more strategies, for the Adriatic and the Ionic Sea, as well as for the Alpine region. Cooperation in macro-regions, i.e. in larger territorial subdivisions which cross state borders, creates opportunities to embed key approaches and strategies, e.g. the Europe 2020 Strategy, more solidly in the regions. At the same time, they create new opportunities for the implementation of EU policies to be able to better take regional characteristics, potentials and challenges into account. This is reflected in the notion of a *place-based approach* (cf. Barca 2009) and the Territorial Agenda 2020. For both macro-strategies, the transnational Interreg programmes for the Baltic Sea and the Danube area are an important reference point.

The Baltic Sea strategy spans eight member states of the European Union with approximately 85 million inhabitants. The strategy is implemented in cooperation with neighbouring countries, such as Norway and Russia. The key concerns of the strategy include strengthening the economy, innovations, environmental protection (especially of the water resources of the Baltic Sea), traffic and transport networks, tourism and culture. The long-term strategy of 2009 devised by the ministers responsible for spatial development (VASAB Cooperation) is also being implemented in close association with the Baltic Sea strategy.

The Danube strategy covers the territories of 11 countries, both of EU member states and of neighbouring countries, with approximately 100 million inhabitants. The intensified exploitation of the Danube for transport purposes, the protection and sustainable use of the Danube Basin as an ecological corridor, protection against flooding and drought as well as the reduction of industrial pollution, a reliable and cost-effective energy supply and higher energy efficiency, and, moreover, the mitigation of the major social and economic disparities are among the greatest challenges the action plan addresses.

4 European urban development policy

Spatial development and urban development are closely interrelated. The *place based approach* (Barca 2009) is particularly relevant in cities. Here the sectoral policies of the various levels converge and are implemented through integrated municipal action strategies. At the same time, the ministers responsible for \triangleright *Urban development* also regularly cooperate in parallel to spatial development. An important milestone of this cooperation was the adoption of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities in 2007 under the German EU Presidency (cf. Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Urban Development and Territorial Cohesion 2007). In the Leipzig Charter, the ministers undertook to integrate the principles and strategies it stipulates into national, regional and local development policies, to advance the instrument of integrated urban development, as well as balanced, spatial development based on the European polycentric city system (\triangleright *City system*). The concepts of an integrated urban development policy should be used more frequently, and more attention should be paid to disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods in

the larger urban context.

The Leipzig Charter was implemented and further developed through numerous programmes and actions. Internet platforms, for example, were established for sharing information and mutual learning for European cities, municipalities and urban regions. The Reference Framework for European Sustainable Cities (RFSC; www.rfsc.eu) aims to contribute to propagating integrated urban development approaches in Europe and to provide a tool for all stakeholders involved, which they can use to assess goals, criteria, methods and measures for urban development against the background of the Leipzig Charter and sustainable development. At the core is an online toolkit, which assists cities in the promotion and expansion of their activities on integrated sustainable urban development. The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN; www.eukn.eu) supports the exchange of information and experience on urban matters in Europe and provides information about examples from practice, research papers, political programmes and reports on European urban development. URBACT (www.urbact.eu) is a programme of the European Commission and member states to fund the exchange of knowledge and experience in relation to integrated urban development.

Based on the ‘Cities of tomorrow’ expert paper (cf. EU 2011), the European Commission has initiated a broad dialogue with member states and cities to jointly identify and define the challenges of European urban development in an *Urban Agenda for the EU*. These current European processes are embedded in the global work on a *New Urban Agenda* as part of UN HABITAT, which was adopted in October 2016 at the UN HABITAT III Conference on housing and sustainable urban development in Quito (cf. *BBSR* 2017).

5 Summary

Ever since the first meeting of the European ministers responsible for spatial development more than 25 years ago, spatially relevant approaches have been established in European policies. They were able to agree on key political documents (ESDP, TAEU, TA 2020) and to establish programmes for research and implementation. In the 2007-2013 funding period, the European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) was upgraded to an independent goal (goal 3) of European structural policy. The European Research Network ESPON, the programmes for Interreg B transnational cooperation as well as the approach of macro-regional strategies have firmly embedded spatial concepts and approaches to action in EU policy. Spatial aspects play an increasingly important role in the structural and sectoral policies of the EU. The goal of enhancing territorial cohesion in Europe, which is closely related to the concept of a European spatial development policy, has been enshrined as a guiding principle in the EU Treaties (Treaty of Lisbon) since 2009.

Despite the European Spatial Development Perspective, there is still no commonly shared spatial vision for the development of the European territory in the future. And despite the three-pronged goal of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Treaty of Lisbon, there are Council configurations for economic and social concerns, but still no formal council for European spatial development or territorial cohesion. Spatially relevant policies are therefore still negotiated and adopted in other Council configurations (the General Affairs Council, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Ecofin), the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council, etc.).

As far as these issues are concerned, the discussion about the further shaping of European spatial development and territorial cohesion in Europe remains a work in progress.

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