

Evelyn Gustedt

## Territorial cohesion



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URN: 0156-559925210

*This is a translation of the following entry:*

Gustedt, Evelyn (2018): Territoriale Kohäsion. In: ARL – Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (Hrsg.): Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung. Hannover, 2663-2668.

*The original version can be accessed here:*

urn:nbn:de:0156-55992521

Typesetting and layout: ProLinguo GmbH

Translation and proofreading: ProLinguo GmbH

# Territorial cohesion

## Contents

- 1 Basic principles
- 2 First steps towards a European spatial development policy
- 3 Further development
- 4 Current discussion

References

Additional literature

**This article traces the origins of the term territorial cohesion from the Treaty of Rome to the Europe 2020 Strategy. It focuses on the various interpretations given to the term as a result of language differences and diverging definitions linked to the respective context of the member states.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: The original article in German aims to illustrate the use of German terminology. This translation also includes corresponding references to English terminology. Differences and inconsistencies in the respective language versions perfectly illustrate the point raised in the article that the use and interpretation of terms vary according to the language and country in question.

## 1 Basic principles

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The origins of cohesion policy (▷ *European regional policy*) can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome in 1957 – more specifically, to the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community. According to the Treaty, the member states are required ‘to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their harmonious development by reducing the differences existing between the various regions and the backwardness of the less favoured regions’ (BMJ [Federal Ministry of Justice] 1957: 1) (▷ *Disparities, spatial*). As a consequence, cohesion policy was interpreted and implemented essentially as a social and economic policy, without any explicit spatial reference. In 1983, however, the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT), which first came together in 1970, drew up a European Regional/Spatial Planning Charter. In general, the French acronym CEMAT is also used in German and English, and stands for *Conférence Européenne des Ministres de l’Aménagement du Territoire*. The Charter refers not only to balanced socio-economic development in the regions, but also to the need for a land resource policy (▷ *Land management*), coordinated sectoral policies (▷ *Spatially-relevant sectoral planning*) and administrative procedures at various levels.

The official version of the Charter is available in English and French, but not in German. It therefore refers to ‘aménagement du territoire’ and ‘European regional/spatial planning’ (Council of Europe 1983). For German specialists in the field, the French term has connotations of the system of spatial organisation in France, which runs counter to the German system of spatial planning and is based on a completely different approach. Similarly, the English term unavoidably triggers associations with the British system of spatial planning or spatial development, and this system is also inconsistent with the spatial planning process in Germany. Thus, one can safely assume that among the member states of the EU, there are widely differing opinions on the division of competences between the EU on the one hand, and the individual member states on the other. These differences apply equally to the methods, instruments and processes involved in spatial planning in the member states (▷ *Planning systems*). Today, the spatial planning remit of the EU remains incompatible with Germany’s understanding of spatial planning, given that the EU is not recognised as the fifth and highest level based on the ▷ *Mutual feedback principle* of German spatial planning law.

## 2 First steps towards a European spatial development policy

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For 30 years following the drafting of the Charter, France was at the forefront of the debate on the configuration of a potential European spatial planning policy (cf. Faludi 2004: 1350). Although this meant that, from a systemic point of view, the link with the French system of ‘aménagement du territoire’ was maintained, translations into German of EU documents and other transnational documents initially used the term ▷ *Spatial planning (Raumordnung)* [literal translation: spatial order or organisation], or less frequently ▷ *Spatial planning (Raumplanung)*, for example in the Commission report ‘Europa 2000 – Perspektiven der künftigen Raumordnung der Gemeinschaft’ (worded slightly differently in the English version: ‘Europe 2000 – Outlook for the Development

of the Community's Territory') (Commission of the European Communities 1991). According to the report, it was thought that Europe was already 'moving towards a spatial planning solution' (Commission of the European Communities 1991: 34). However, the follow-up report, entitled in German 'Europa 2000+ – Europäische Zusammenarbeit bei der Raumentwicklung' ('Europe 2000+ – European Cooperation in Spatial Development') (European Commission 1994), avoided the term *Raumordnung* (*spatial planning*) and instead introduced the term ▷ *Raumentwicklung* (*spatial development*), while the English version is actually entitled 'Europe 2000+ – Cooperation for European Territorial Development', thus preferring the term *territorial development*. The terms were firmly rooted in the respective systems of certain member states in line with their own legal definition, and were thus unworkable at the EU's limited level of action. A neutral European term had not yet been coined (▷ *European spatial development policy*).

This situation was remedied by Michel Barnier, who had already played a defining role in his capacity as France's Minister for European Affairs (from 1995 to 1997). He succeeded Monika Wulf-Mathies, who was EU Commissioner for Regional Policy from 1994 to 1999, and he remained in this post until 2004. The Wulf-Mathies era saw not just the establishment of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), but also the extension of INTERREG to include Strand B – transnational projects (▷ *Cooperation, transnational*). The ESDP was conceived purely on the basis of informal Council meetings between the member states' ministers for spatial planning from 1989 (kickoff meeting in Nantes) to 1999 (final conference in Potsdam). Even so, it was the European Commission (▷ *European Union*) that was responsible for chairing these meetings and covering the costs of the publication and translation of the ESDP.

This well-known, though more or less unofficial, document was entitled *European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)* – in French *Schéma de Développement Européen Commun (SDEC)* – and it was particularly during the drafting process that the elaboration of guidelines for the territorial development of the EU was linked not just to the search for a standardised term, but also to the as yet unclarified question of the allocation of competences. The latter question arose because Germany, in particular, would only consent to a spatial planning policy organised exclusively by the individual member states (rather than by the Community method). Andreas Faludi and Bas Waterhout give a meticulous account of the process that culminated in the creation of the ESDP (cf. Faludi/Waterhout 2003).

### 3 Further development

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It was finally in the Barnier era that the term *territoriale Kohäsion* (*territorial cohesion*) was coined, and Chapter 1.3 of the Second Cohesion Report was dedicated entirely to this concept (cf. European Commission 2001). In the Third Cohesion Report (European Commission 2004), cohesion policy was defined according to three priorities: (1) convergence, (2) competitiveness and (3) cooperation. The latter was defined in the German edition of the newsletter inforegio news (cf. European Commission – Directorate General for Regional Policy 2004) as 'Europäische Kooperation im Bereich der *Raumordnung*' (emphasis added) – this translates as 'European cooperation in spatial planning', though in the English version it was referred to simply as 'European territorial cooperation' – and it aimed at 'supporting cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation' (European Commission – Directorate-General Regional Policy 2004: 2).

## Territorial cohesion

The term *territoriale Kohäsion* (territorial cohesion) was finally officially established by the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997, albeit only as an element for enhancing social cohesion (cf. European Commission 1997). It subsequently grew more important as a result of various ESPON studies, the Territorial Agenda (cf. *BMUB* [Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety] 2011) and notably the EU's Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (cf. Commission of the European Communities 2008), as well as the consultation process, which lasted until the end of February 2009. It was not until the Lisbon Treaty (cf. European Commission 2007: Article 3) that the concept was finally accorded the status of a separate third dimension of cohesion policy. In the subsequent Europe 2020 Strategy, however, its importance as one of the three goals of cohesion policy was scaled back again, and it was described only as a prerequisite for the funding eligibility of an economy – the strategy ‘puts forward three mutually reinforcing priorities: smart growth [...], sustainable growth [...] and inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion’ (European Commission 2010: 5).

Over the years, prominent academics, policymakers and practitioners in the field of spatial development in Europe and individual member states have interpreted the term *territorial cohesion* in numerous different ways. This has led to various historical analyses and references to the political implications of territorial cohesion. Nevertheless, it has as yet proved impossible to devise a fully integrated concept of territorial cohesion that covers all its dimensions and, above all, a viable method to evaluate it.

## 4 Current discussion

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At the time of the consultation process, Böhme, Eser, Gaskell et al. (2008) had already described five key elements for achieving territorial cohesion: (1) recognition of the diversity of territories, (2) identification of their specific spatial potential, (3) consideration of the territorial context, (4) equitable provision of infrastructure and services and (5) adaptation of governance structures (▷ *Governance*). The debate around indicators generally calls for at least two types: indicators that demonstrate the need for support, and those that evidence efficient and effective use of resources. Here, any territory, regardless of its geographic and political position within the European area as a whole, should be assessed from the point of view of its specific potential and fragility. What proved particularly important in connection with the consultation process was the vertical and, above all, horizontal coordination of various policy areas. The resulting impact depends on the context in question and the intervention of various policies. Since the effects only become visible – only manifest themselves in the territory in question – after the implementation phase, and sometimes only after some considerable delay, there is deemed to be an additional need for enhanced awareness (*ex ante*) of the potential repercussions, synergies or costs of a lack of coordination (cf. Böhme/Eser/Gaskell et al. 2008).

The academic and political debate on the essence of territorial cohesion is still ongoing, and encompasses some fundamental questions. One of these concerns the clearly shifting definition of territory (cf. Faludi 2013) in connection with the debate on so-called *soft spaces*. Similarly, the search goes on for an answer to the question of how to define governance in relation to territorial cohesion in such a way as to achieve a common EU-wide understanding in the context of a converging, yet still fragile European Union (cf. Stead 2014).

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## Territorial cohesion

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Last update of the references: December 2020