



DEFINITION OF TERRITORIAL COHESION

1. General

The EU spatial policy objective of Territorial Cohesion has gained importance since it has been branded as an essential factor for achieving the Lisbon/Gothenburg goals. Although this new policy objective was understood as relevant for the EU territory as a whole, the success of a policy on the large scale depends largely on its implementation at lower levels.

For successful implementation of Territorial Cohesion, experts and politicians responsible for spatial development working at all scale levels should have a clear understanding of what Territorial Cohesion is and how it can be achieved.

ECTP, uniting the national associations of spatial planners in Europe, has therefore worked on the definition of Territorial Cohesion (this paper) and the way to achieve it (paper on “*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*”).

The main challenge of this paper was to propose a definition that helps to implement the Territorial Cohesion policy by:

- Creating understanding to spatial planning practitioners
- Providing clarity about supportive planning interventions
- Being applicable on all scale levels
- Enabling elaboration into measurable and/or qualitative indicators.

The proposed ECTP definition of Territorial Cohesion presented below draws on work by Roberto Camagni and the ECTP working group lead by Jan Vogelij. It aims to translate the considerations of official EU documents and the ECTP paper “*Strategic Planning towards Territorial Cohesion*” into practical terms, enabling spatial planning practitioners to work towards achieving the EU spatial development objective Territorial Cohesion.

EU cohesion policy aims to enhance Europe's future prosperity and quality of life through its economic and social cohesion policies. Territorial Cohesion has been added recently to support the opportunities for sustainable development for the future generations of Europe. The definition of Territorial Cohesion should not only add the territorial aspects to economic and social cohesion but should also identify those physical aspects that do not duplicate the social and economic aspects.

Since cohesion is a unifying force it should be regarded as the power of the territorial aspects of a given spatial entity, which provides better opportunities for development for future generations.

Spatial planners as the most relevant experts should be fully engaged in defining the policy objective Territorial Cohesion. Our definition will be proposed to the official bodies that work on the elaboration of the policy objective such as the ‘Green Paper’ group within DG REGIO and the COTER group in the Committee of the Regions.

This paper concludes in the (draft) proposal of the ECTP definition:

***Territorial Cohesion is:
‘The Reinforcing Power of a Territory’s Spatial Qualities and Synergies’***

2. Analyzing Territorial Cohesion

Although some tend to define Territorial Cohesion as territorial aspects of social and economic cohesion, the environment as determined by physical infrastructure, functional systems, cultural and historic characteristics, landscape and nature provides distinct spatial qualities that influence quality of life, use of resources, accessibility and opportunities for economic growth, economic specialization and innovation in a region.

Camagni identified three components of Territorial Cohesion:

TERRITORIAL QUALITY	for economic innovation, natural values and quality of life
TERRITORIAL EFFICIENCY	for economic growth, minimal use of (land) resources and accessibility
TERRITORIAL IDENTITY	for economic specialization, landscape, culture, historic assets.

He applied the word 'glue' when speaking about the uniting effect of territorial cohesion.

In order to define TERRITORIAL COHESION in terms related to interventions of spatial planning practitioners, two questions are relevant:

'What unites territories?'

To which the answer could be:

Coherence follows from the uniting effects of:

- Cooperation of interdependent parts of territories
- Interrelations between the parts by connections
- Effectiveness of the functioning of virtual and physical networks

Spatial planning interventions that facilitate the easy cooperation, interrelations and effectiveness between sub-territories are supportive to territorial cohesion.

These enhance the competitiveness and social solidarity in a region.

And the opposite question:

'What makes territories fall apart?'

The answer to that question is:

Fragmentation follows from:

- Independently functioning of loose territorial units
- Poor connections between sub-regional territories
- Ineffective functioning of networks

Spatial planning interventions which articulate functional barriers between sub-territories and sectors enhance territorial fragmentation. These result in economic weakness and social disintegration.

3. Defining Territorial Cohesion

Formulating a comprehensive definition of such a complex notion as Territorial Cohesion results in a long definition with a descriptive character such as:

TERRITORIAL COHESION IS:

The EU Spatial development policy objective, which completes the social and economic cohesion policies, by adding territorial aspects.¹⁾

A coherent territory offers high quality by efficient functioning as a whole.

A coherent territory involves all sub-territories which contribute to the whole in accordance with their distinct natural, cultural social and economic assets, commonly providing a characteristic, varied identity to the whole of the territory.²⁾

The territorial cohesion of a region is higher if the quality, efficiency and identity of the territory's internal and external systems and their interrelations are higher.³⁾

These require spatial planning proposals focused on:

(internally)

- Wholeness of the functional sector systems⁴⁾
- Synergy at the interconnections between sector systems
- Harmonious fit of the functional, natural and cultural patterns

(externally)

- Position as component of wider systems
- Accessibility to metropolitan areas, corridors and large natural areas
- Distinct comparative advantages of its natural and cultural assets.

These six aspects of the description of Territorial Cohesion refer respectively to territorial systems, interconnections, fit in other patterns, relative position, access and comparative advantages, which are all influenced by planning interventions on different scales. Each of these aspects can be elaborated and translated into indicators, quantitatively and some more qualitatively.

A clear aspect of Territorial Cohesion is its *binding force*, uniting separate parts, and the *synergy* in the combination of functions and existing assets, which enhance the effectiveness of the territory's functional systems.

The optimal use of the region's endogenous qualities for future developments also enhances the territorial coherence, by articulation and re-interpretation of relevant aspects of its identity.

The identity consists of the territory's *economic, social, cultural and natural capital*, which can be summarized in the term: the *territory's qualities*.

So a short definition of TERRITORIAL COHESION might be:

'THE UNITING FORCE OF TERRITORIAL QUALITIES AND SYNERGIES WHICH OPTIMIZE THE TERRITORY'S DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES'⁵⁾

It belongs to the SPATIAL PLANNER'S challenges to strategically enhance the TERRITORIAL QUALITIES so that development opportunities maximize in accordance with the TERRITORIAL CAPITAL.

If, as expressed in many official documents, Territorial Cohesion is generally acknowledged as the policy objective that enforces the INNOVATIVE and COMPETITIVE POWERS of a region, supportive to both the Lisbon and Gothenburg policies, than the definition might even be shorter:

TERRITORIAL COHESION IS:

'THE REINFORCING POWER OF A TERRITORY'S QUALITIES AND SYNERGIES'

CLARIFICATION

- 1) This assumes that social and economic aspects of cohesion policy are covered by social and economic cohesion, so here we can focus more (but not only) on physical aspects of cohesion.
- 2) It is important that every function of a sub-territory within the wider territory might be essential contributions for the functioning of the whole: some regions are to be natural areas, some intensive production areas, others quiet residential regions. Not every region can become Silicon Valley.
- 3) The dynamics of connections, relations and flows is as important for future development as the historic assets of cultural and natural identity. The interplay of both provides the region-specific opportunities for future development.
- 4) Co-operation of spatial planners and sector planners is a requirement for co-ordination and efficiency within the sector systems, but the extra value of synergies between systems in their interconnections requires flexibility and creativity with regard to sector efficiency.
- 5) The term development should not be misunderstood: there is a general tendency connected to the focus on development as being conventional economic development in relation to investments. Whereas for spatial planning, 'development' is a more neutral term containing all types of land-uses. Also enhancing non-built functions such as natural areas are considered in spatial planning activities.

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