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THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL COHESION AS THE BASIS FOR EUROPEAN SPATIAL PLANNING

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1. Introduction

The EU's regional policy has unquestionably been a key element in the European construction process. Yet, the Community- and intergovernmental-led march towards achieving this cohesion has been, and continues to be, "long and chaotic" (Salez, 2009: 37). The debates maintained at the heart of the EU concerning the integration process and its role in reducing regional disparities engendered what might be called the European model of integration (Garrido et al., 2007); however, today, the EU considers that this integration can only be deemed credible if a sufficient degree of economic and social cohesion is achieved between its member states. It is for this reason that the EU has come to consider the need for a regional or cohesion policy.

Each step in the accession process represents a considerable challenge to the Union's objectives of achieving economic, social and territorial cohesion. The task facing the EU authorities becomes increasingly more complex as the Union expands, since countries whose levels of development are well below those of the founding members accede to the Union, ushering in with them new kinds of imbalance. And these regional inequalities are likely to become more marked in the future as new countries gain accession, as may well occur should Turkey become a member.

The importance of the Union's regional and cohesion policy lies in the fact that it helps achieve one of the founding Treaty's fundamental aims: namely the European Union's economic, social and, more recently, territorial cohesion, by reducing the disparities between its regions and by ensuring a more equitable distribution of the advantages of the common market throughout its territory. Today more than a third of the Union's budget is assigned to the financial instruments of this cohesion policy. In 2008, for the first time, achieving cohesion became the EU's most important objective as measured in budgetary terms, ahead of the agricultural policy which had until then occupied first position.

The EU's cohesion policy has thus acquired vital importance both in budgetary and political terms. However, in the decades since its introduction, it has been frequently questioned because of its high costs and lack of effectiveness, and the European authorities have had to adapt it to prevailing interests at each step of the way.

In addition to its having been adopted as an official objective in the Treaties, territorial cohesion has also become one of the essential concepts in European territorial debates. The presence of the term in leading Union documents seems to indicate that territorial cohesion is set to play a significant role in future European Union policy making (Davoudi, 2007). However, the traditional absence of Union powers or competences in such areas as spatial policies and planning represents too great a barrier to the growing need for regional balance (Camagni, 2004); hence, the importance of having competences in areas related to territorial cohesion. All the indications are that, in the future, the European Commission wishes to implement this markedly intergovernmental vision of European spatial planning by instigating territorial cohesion (Farinós, 2004).

2. The evolution in the EU's cohesion policy

At the birth of the European Economic Community in 1957, the signatory states of the Treaty of Rome referred to the need to strengthen the unity of their economies and to ensure their development by reducing the differences between regions. However, the Treaty did not foresee any specific financial instrument for regional development or for alleviating the disparities between countries and regions.

Later, the 1973 economic crisis, and the economic restructuring to which it gave rise, served to highlight differences in development between certain member states. These inter-regional differences became more marked following the accession of the United Kingdom and Ireland (in 1973), Greece (in 1981), and Portugal and Spain (both in 1986) to the EU. Since then, the creation of an effective structural policy became indispensable for reducing differences in development and in the standard of living between countries and regions.

A policy to correct regional imbalances was formally introduced in 1975. This saw the creation of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), whose objectives were the

participation in the development and structural adjustment of economically depressed regions and the regeneration of industrial regions in decline, by stimulating interregional cooperation and trans-European networks. Its creation as a "supranational" fund ushered in a new approach to the European construction process and gave the member states a new role in it.

The subsequent evolution in the Community's treaties and in its regional policy has had a considerable bearing on the parallel process of the European Union's expansion. After each expansion, the area and population of the EU have increased notably, generating new territorial imbalances especially as regards GDP and per capita income. With the signing of each of the treaties, the community's regional policy has evolved, adapting to the technical and political problems that have arisen in the successive steps in its expansion and to the changes in socio-economic conditions, while rectifying the defects detected in the operation of its programmes (Benabent, 2006).

In 1986, the Single European Act (SEA) introduced the objective of economic and social cohesion, thereby establishing the bases for a fully-fledged regional policy, the aim of which was to serve to compensate the burdens imposed by the single market on countries in the south and other disadvantaged regions. As a result of the Single Act, and in line with the objectives of the Single Market, the most far-reaching reform to date of the Structural Funds was introduced (Mancha & Garrido, 2004). Indeed, from this date (1988) it is possible to speak of a true European regional policy, which would later come to be known as its "cohesion policy".

However, Jacques Delors[1], the then president of the European Commission and the leading proponent of the EU's regional policy, expressed his doubts about the struggle between competitiveness and solidarity, the basis of the original European regional policy: "Europe sees its future as striking a balance between competition and cooperation, (…) Is this easily done? No. Market forces are powerful. (…) Man's endeavour and political aspiration is to try to develop a balanced territory".

[1] Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission between 1985 and 1995. Declarations made in 1989, during the implementation of the so-called "Delors I Package", and recorded in "EU Cohesion Policy 1988-2008: Investing in Europe's future", Inforegio (2008).

According to many experts and politicians, including Delors, in processes of economic liberalisation and integration, the benefits of growth are not equally shared out among territories, economic sectors and social groups, rather they tend to concentrate in those that start off in the most advantageous position. This belief explains why the major political agreement for the establishment of the internal market was accompanied by a parallel pact - also political and of equal importance, to strengthen the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion. The liberal principle, which places its faith in the capacity of the market to correct imbalances, was thus given a social democrat spin: natural market trends and forces required the counterweight of public sector action. Likewise, the processes of economic integration had to be accompanied by corrective policies of the inherent tendencies towards concentration in these very processes. This idea underpins the major overhaul carried out on the Structural Funds.

The signing of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) or the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 gave new impetus to European regional policy and made more resources available for financing this policy. The TEU also matched up the concepts of "convergence" and "cohesion", thereby identifying cohesion as one of the fundamental objectives of the Union.

The 2000-2006 period of policy programming however represented a break in this tendency to assign greater importance to the objectives of economic and social cohesion. EU regional policy maintained its *status quo* and did not gain any greater political importance (Garrido et al., 2007). Yet, the new territorial and integrated dimension of regional policy converted it into an effective and necessary instrument for European spatial planning. Thus, the way in which the set of structural actions was designed saw the establishment of a close interdependence between regional policy and spatial planning (Plaza, 2002).

Table 1: Main landmarks in the evolution of the EU's regional policy

1957	The Treaty of Rome refers to the need to reduce differences between regions.
1975	Creation of the ERDF.
1986	The SEA establishes the bases for cohesion policy.
1988	The EU adopts the Community Charter for Regionalization

1989-1993	First reform of the Structural Funds, endowing regional policy with a true European dimension.
1992	The TEU establishes cohesion as one of the main objectives of the EU and foresees the creation of the Cohesion Fund.
1997	The Treaty of Amsterdam reaffirms the importance of cohesion
2000-2006	Structural Fund reforms: further concentrating financial aid
2007-2013	Latest reform of Structural Funds: introduction of three new objectives

Source: author's compilation based on Inforegio

In 2003, the Sapir Report claimed that the Union's regional policy had failed in its objective of promoting competitiveness, being excessively bureaucratic, in addition to very costly and ineffective. Based on the conclusions of this report, various proposals were made to reassess the economic situation of the Union. Some member states expressed their wish to reduce the budget aimed at promoting cohesion and, instead, to increase their contribution dedicated to promoting the objectives of the Lisbon Treaty. And thus, to a certain degree, the first links were forged between cohesion policy and the Lisbon strategy. In order to avoid the criticisms to which the cohesion policy was being subjected, the decision was taken to make the latter an effective instrument with which to seek greater competitiveness.

Today, when the integration process is largely consolidated and the expansion of the EU towards Eastern Europe is a reality, the debate has come down in favour of the position held by the net-contributing countries and against that held by the so-called countries of cohesion. When the needs are greatest in size and extent, the response of the EU has been to stabilize costs and to put its regional policy at the service of the Lisbon agenda. The result has been a policy that seeks to enhance effectiveness and to focus its attention on needs, but which perhaps pays less attention to the realities of the regions (Garrido et al., 2007). Indeed, it has abandoned its former name of "regional policy" in favour of the even more neutral "cohesion policy" (Salez, 2009). With the advent of a major international economic crisis, which has had far reaching effects on the Union and its member states, the balance has shifted in favour of the search for competitiveness and economic dynamism.

Although in recent years it has been somewhat restrained, the cohesion policy continues to concentrate a large proportion of the budgets that the EU handles. The financial resources assigned to achieving this objective represent more than a third of the Union's budget for the

period 2007-2013. In this period, the regional policy has come out clearly in favour of Europe's competitiveness and its Lisbon and Gothenburg commitments (Garrido et al., 2007).

Convergence will predictably continue to be a key objective in the EU's regional policy, given that at each new stage in the expansion process new needs of convergence emerge among the member states. In a rapidly evolving economic and social context, such as that presented by the Community, its cohesion policy can play a complex but fundamental role, promoting economic convergence and consolidating the European social model. However, the debate concerning the evolution and adaptation of its cohesion policy remains ongoing in the heart of the EU.

3. Cohesion policy and the Lisbon Strategy: a relationship based on mutual need

The application of the Lisbon Strategy by the Union's member states has become the main priority on the Community's agenda. It is for this reason that, in seeking to obtain better results in its application, the need has arisen to endow the Strategy with a greater territorial dimension and to improve territorial governance at all institutional levels (Farinós, 2009). The EU is fully aware that its very economic competitiveness is based on optimising the specific "territorial capital" of each region and its capacity to mobilise resources at the state and community levels (including, here, its cohesion policy). Therefore, the territorial dimension of the Lisbon Strategy leads assuredly to the strengthening of the territorial capital of the cities and regions. This fact is undoubtedly reflected in the territorial instruments and strategies that the Union now has at its disposal, both in its cohesion and territorial policy.

It is more than apparent, therefore, that cohesion policy is today one of the most important instruments for achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (concerned as it is with economic competitiveness). Indeed, the Lisbon Strategy and the Structural Funds both seek economic growth, understood, in terms of regional policy, as the promotion of convergence between Europe's countries and regions. The Commission itself recognizes that this cohesion policy could serve as the financial incentive that will allow the European member states and regions to become more competitive (Moreno et al., 2005), thereby placing regional policy at the service of the Lisbon Strategy, which seeks to make the European economy the most competitive and dynamic in the world. Territorial cohesion rarely appears in the negotiations between the Commission and member states about national strategic priorities. When sharing

out the Structural Funds, the eligibility of those that seek to strengthen the competitiveness of the regions is greatest. These are the regions that have the capacity to recover from the economic and social challenges attributable to an open economy subject to competition. Seventy-five per cent of the Funds destined to Objective 2 programmes ("Regional competition and employment") and 60% of those destined to Objective 1 programmes ("Convergence") are assigned to measures that support I+D, promote entrepreneurial spirit, the information society, training, human resources and transport. These projects, which are increasingly being managed by the Union should, necessarily, respect the rules of eligibility linked to the Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy, which are becoming exceedingly strict; a system (*earmarking*) that some authors have compared to the procedures a farmer's animals must be subjected to in the livestock market (Baudelle, 2009: 42). Likewise, social cohesion constitutes one of the five main areas in which the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy are grouped, but despite the fact that these also include the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the main objective is that of generating human capital to meet the general goal of international competitiveness.

Therefore, cohesion policy would appear to be adopting a nature that is more closely dedicated to the enhancement of competitiveness than that of the traditional correction of imbalances. Some authors have already baptized this process as the "*Lisbonisation*" of community policies (Salez, 2009), a factor that has "saved" cohesion policy from the cut backs to which some net-contributing countries to the European budget wanted to subject it, especially following the 2004-2006 budget debate. The publication, in 2003, of the aforementioned Sapir Report played a considerable role in this "*Lisbonisation*" process, given that it was heavily critical of the costs and effectiveness of the cohesion policy compared to policies promoting economic competitiveness.

Another of these policies that is being subject to this process of "Lisbonisation" is the EU's territorial policy which, in line with its regional policy, maintains increasingly closer relations with the Lisbon Strategy, as shown by the tendencies of recent years. At the meetings in Rotterdam (2004) and Luxemburg (2005) the task was accepted of giving the Strategy of Lisbon-Gothenburg a territorial dimension, combining it with the objectives and directives of the European Territorial Strategy – ETS (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Triangle of the ETS objectives combined with the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies
Source: based on the EC (1999) and Farinós (2009)

The first step towards achieving this was the passing of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union, a document published in 2007 comprising general directives for Europe's spatial planning. This document, although legally non-binding, provides us with an idea of what the Union understands should be the goal of spatial planning at the European scale, given that it is subtitled: "Towards a more competitive and sustainable Europe of diverse regions". In the second paragraph of the text it declares that the document "supports the complementary strategies" of Lisbon and Gothenburg (CE, 2007: 1), and throughout the document constant allusions are made to "sustainable economic growth" as one of the main aims of the Agenda. The diversity (identities and "potentials") of the European regions is seen as a factor that can foster economic growth and job creation. As such, this publication highlights just what the current trends in the EU's territorial affairs are. For the EU, its territorial policy is key to the search for the much sought after economic competitiveness of the Union.

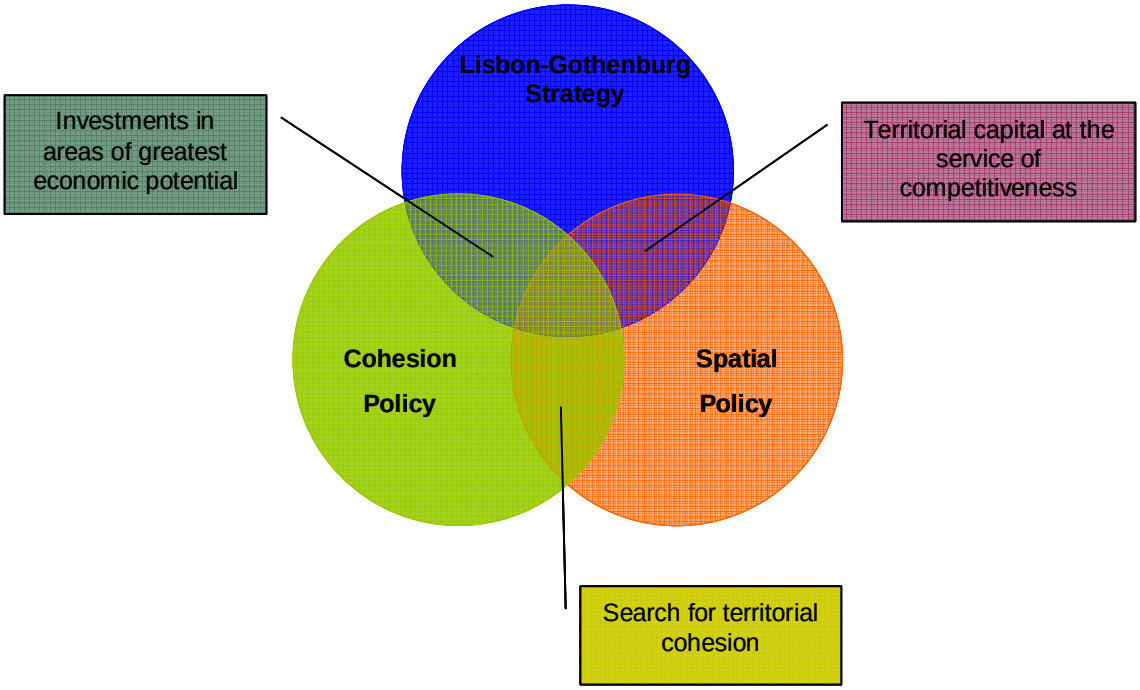

Figure 2: Convergence between cohesion policy, spatial policy and Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy.
Source: author's own compilation

Indeed, recent trends show how spatial policy, cohesion policy and the Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy have begun to overlap and to work in an increasing number of common areas for action and to share common objectives, so that the borders that separate them have become decidedly fuzzy (Figure 2). On the one hand, the line that separates cohesion policy from territorial policy has become an increasingly fine one, since the search for territorial cohesion can be assimilated to a large extent within spatial planning programmes. Likewise, both policies have been oriented to the service of the Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy, where the overall goal is to increase the competitiveness and dynamism of the European economy. This is to be achieved by exploiting its territorial diversity, in the case of spatial policy (as revealed by the Territorial Agenda of the EU), and by mobilising resources towards the "competitiveness poles", which is possible thanks to the Cohesion Fund of its regional policy.

In short, in the absence of a precise definition of territorial cohesion, the EU has been able to adapt to the new economic-political situation, and this has enabled it to orientate its cohesion

policy towards the search for competitiveness, a goal for which, in principle, it was not devised.

4. The role of territorial cohesion in the Europeanisation of spatial planning

As is known, the European Union has no explicit competence for spatial planning, and as such it is not a well established policy at the European scale. Theoretically, the EU has no powers to intervene in spatial planning, at least in any legally binding sense. But despite this, its activity has had significant impact on the European territory, especially through its sectoral policies, and more specifically through its cohesion policy. It is difficult to obtain an accurate picture of how the European Union's activity affects territorial development, since its territorial impact tends to be underestimated or unknown. Indeed, some authors claim that the EU is effectively implementing a *clandestine* territorial policy, via its sectoral policies (van Ravesteyn and Evers, 2004: 14).

Similarly, the Union has published various documents that have as their goal the spatial planning of Europe, and which despite their non-legally binding nature (given the EU's lack of competence in this field), they have had a great influence on the spatial planning programmes of the member states as well as on the Community's own policies. The most significant of these documents is probably the European Territorial Strategy (ETS), published in 1999, and which arguably represents the most important landmark in European spatial planning to date (Farinós, 2004). The ETS defines for the first time the main objectives and models of the European Union's spatial policy, for which it first obtained the backing of all the member states and the Union. Its overall purpose was to serve as a framework of reference for sectoral policies with territorial repercussions, both for the EU and the member states.

Despite these attempts to establish a European territorial policy, the term *spatial planning* in itself is largely forbidden in the Community's vocabulary, precisely because it evokes a domain reserved for the member states (Baudelle, 2009: 40). Officially, mention is made solely of "territorial development" (as is the case in the ETS) or of "regional policy", although the latter was abandoned in 2007 when the term "cohesion policy" came into use, albeit that it is less precise than the earlier expression. Today, the favoured term used in community documents is that of "territorial cohesion", which, although it has yet to be officially defined

(or perhaps precisely because of that), could become the Trojan horse via which the EU exercises true spatial planning in Europe.

4.1. The territorial dimension of cohesion policy

Territorial cohesion, having been adopted as one of the EU's main principles in the Lisbon Treaty, is acquiring increasing relevance in EU-produced documents. Thus, it often appears linked to high-impact policy actions throughout European territory, and given its capacity to structure the territory, cohesion policy has become closely linked with spatial planning. The Territorial Agenda of the EU, which succeeded the ETS, set itself the main goal of strengthening territorial cohesion, and it even served as the basis for the drafting of the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, thereby highlighting the link it shares with spatial planning. Moreover, as discussed above, the policy enjoys a very sizeable budget and well-consolidated financial instruments, which confirm its capacity to act.

In fact, opinion is divided as to whether cohesion policy should or should not strengthen territorial strategies in their attempt to tackle the main territorial imbalances in the EU. However, this is a question of vital importance, since it could condition the emergence of the EU's own territorial policy. Furthermore, the Community authorities appear to have deduced that if they wish to implement the Lisbon Strategy successfully, EU policy requires a broader territorial dimension. Indeed, the EU's conception of territorial cohesion, very similar in this regard to the French idea of *aménagement du territoire* (Faludi, 2003), appears to lead to the assumption of a commitment to policies in which *space matters*.

In essence, the *aménagement du territoire* expresses the will to plan the territory as a whole and is, as such, simply a manifestation of the current paradigm of regional development. Although no official definition of territorial cohesion yet exists, the message constantly repeated by the European authorities is that it is complementary to the aims of economic and social cohesion and the balanced development of the EU. What appears to emerge from European documents is the development of a set of policies centred on territorial cohesion, constructed on classic redistributive regional policies, to which have been added the attainment of competitiveness, endogenous development, sustainability and good governance (Faludi, 2009); all concepts with close links to spatial planning. In fact, the majority of planners appear convinced that the "next ETS" should serve to achieve the goal of territorial

cohesion for the good of the European Community (Janin Rivolin, 2005). Indeed, even within ESPON itself, it is recognised that, due to the little recognition afforded the ETS by the Community's institutions, it is highly unlikely to figure in the EU's future spatial policy. In its place, territorial cohesion has rapidly gained ground since its introduction in 2001 and, to a certain extent, it has come to replace the ETS (Nordregio, 2006). Moreover, aware of the fact that European spatial planning as a legal competence is not currently in vogue, territorial cohesion (now an officially shared objective of the Union) could meet the same goals, and serve as the policy for territorial management and the integral and coordinated focus for these policies. Indeed, territorial cohesion has now emerged as an essential concept in various documents of great territorial importance, as is the case of the Strategic Guidelines for the Structural Funds for the period 2007-2013, and the aforementioned Territorial Agenda of the European Union.

What is true is that, thanks to the transformation undergone in recent years by regional policy, today cohesion and territorial policies are separated by little more than a fuzzy border. If in its conception, cohesion policy lacked a truly territorial approach (having simply a redistributive function), its evolution shows a marked tendency towards acquiring a territorial dimension, especially following the introduction of the concept of territorial cohesion in the Treaties and official documents of the EU. What's more, the European Commission's conception of territorial cohesion is such that it could be compared to, or translated as, a true policy of spatial planning at the European scale. Thus, the community's initiatives related to cohesion often overlap with those related to spatial planning, that is, both policies share a vast field of action.

Since the passing of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU and its member states have taken on shared competence for cohesion policy. This represents an important step as it grants the European Commission the exclusive right to take initiatives in issues relating to cohesion. Likewise, should territorial cohesion serve as the path to an eventual spatial policy, it would mean the EU assuming territorial competences. The various reforms instigated by the Treaties confirm this horizontal extension of the EU's competences (the granting to the EU of all possible competences), at the same time as a vertical limitation is placed on the exercising of this competence, in keeping with the subsidiarity principle. Accordingly, the EU could also be granted spatial planning powers, albeit that its exercising of this competence would be

restricted. Furthermore, such a recognition would clearly contribute to define the limits of its competences over the territory, a key question given the complexity of the Community's system of competences (González-Varas, 2004).

The granting of this European-wide competence in spatial planning would serve to open a path via which states might implement those actions, which unaided, they could not hope to introduce. The European Union would facilitate those actions that the states, acting individually, would find too costly or complex to implement. An obvious example of this are transnational or cross-border initiatives or actions in which two or more countries collaborate or work together to achieve common territorial goals. There exist territorial problems which, because of their nature, have a cross-border or transnational character, and for this reason require effective cooperation at the Community level in order that joint strategies of planning might be drawn up to provide a joint response to problems of mutual interests. Furthermore, due to the dynamism today of the Community's borders (not just the internal ones but also the EU's external frontiers), the relevance and need for cross-border territorial planning is all the greater (Hildenbrand, 2002). A number of sectoral actions can also be identified that have a direct impact on regional development, such as the trans-European transport and energy networks, and which require a supra-state design, focus and financing as well as a coordination between various authorities. In this case, the competences are already held by the EU, but it is possible that their effects might contradict other policies implemented by the Union. There can be little doubt that the joint coordinated action that these policies require can be facilitated by their incorporation within integral territorial perspectives at the Community level and the coordination of these actions with the member states' existing spatial planning documents.

An essential characteristic of many of the transnational initiatives being undertaken within the EU is that they represent cases of "soft planning" (i.e., non normative), designed moreover for "soft spaces". This refers to the fact that the spaces in which these initiatives are applied are usually macro regions, areas that have no clearly delimited administrative borders and which are somewhat vague, imprecise representations, as is the case for example of the Atlantic Arc, the Baltic Sea or the Mediterranean Arc. This should come as no great surprise given that, to some extent, the European Union is also a "soft space", since the effects of its policies are not limited to the territory occupied by its member countries, but rather extend beyond its frontiers, and have an impact on candidate countries as well as on non-candidate

countries, without it being possible to delimit clearly the territory in which the policies are established.

4.2. The progressive Europeanisation of territorial policies. The example of Spain.

In the European Union today, Community intervention in the national and regional policies of its member states is becoming more marked. The sectoral policies that the EU implements have a great capacity to structure the territory - not only is this the case of its cohesion policy but also of its policy on the environment, transport, and agriculture, etc. For this reason, the lower scales of government need also to include in their territorial plans those actions that might be derived from these sectoral policies. Thus, the formation of trans-European networks, among others, requires national and regional governments to incorporate within their management plans the network that results from the Community's sectoral competence. This has been the case of the Territorial Plan for Andalucía (Spain), for example, which incorporates possible lines of cooperation with Portugal and the Maghreb.

In this sense, it would seem that the planning of national, regional or local territories cannot be conceived independently of their broader European context. Thus, we can speak of the "Europeanisation" of spatial planning practices, defined as the "growing influence of the European context on territorial policies" undertaken at different scales of the European territory (Baudelle, 2009: 39). This process of Europeanisation is characterised by the construction, diffusion and institutionalisation of the rules and procedures (be they formal or informal) defined initially in European regulations, which subsequently have been incorporated in the discourse and policies at lower levels. The European Union is a prime example of this trend, to the extent that the policies exercised by its 27 member states and their regions are necessarily included in the Community framework, defined in reality by the members themselves, but to which at the same time they are also subject.

What is true is that, today, spatial planning at national, regional and local scales cannot be separated from its European context, because of this process of the Europeanisation of spatial planning at the lower planning levels throughout Europe. To date, this process has been undertaken in what has been a largely indirect or informal way, although there are a number of experts who argue that the European authorities should acquire and exercise the official legal capacity of integrating the European dimension within national territorial policies. And

to achieve this, territorial cohesion, now as an official competence of the EU, would play a key role.

Via this process of the Europeanisation of spatial planning, the *territory* would no longer be a national reality, but would rather manifest a European character that transcends that of the state itself; an idea that is quite radical bearing in mind that the territory is an essential pillar of state sovereignty.

The Europeanisation of spatial planning has a number of implications (Böhme and Waterhout, 2008): first, the emergence of the European dimension at the lower scales of planning; second, the influence of European territorial planning on the EU itself and on its sectoral policies; and finally, the influence of sectoral policies and European integration on the planning of the member states. It is this last implication where the influence of territorial cohesion policy is most obviously felt, as a sectoral policy that has specific effects on the territory of the member states.

The Europeanisation of territorial planning at state, regional and local levels is today a reality and is having a series of impacts on territorial policy at a range of geographical scales. As well as the aforementioned effects of the transnational projects, and the influence wielded by sectoral policies, a series of changes is also occurring in the public policy practices and models of the member states and regions (Dühr, Colomb and Nadin, 2010): new objectives, agents, networks, methods, etc., are being observed. One of the principal changes noted in the planning tools at lower scales is the adoption of the new conceptual framework from the European context, so that concepts such as polycentrism, good governance, territorial cohesion, etc. are beginning to appear and even acquire importance in these tools. Similarly, the political objectives, principles and methods used by the European authorities have been assimilated by at least some of the plans regulating lower scales. Such is the case of the Spanish state, where a part of the planning tools reveal a clear influence of the documents published by the EU and the Council of Europe. Thus, various territorial and legislative plans at the regional scale cite European documents as justification for their actions: a good example of this is the European Spatial Planning Charter cited in the laws of Aragón, Castilla y León, Galicia, Islas Baleares and the Comunidad Valenciana. Direct reference is also made to other documents such as the ETS (taken as a model for the Territorial Strategy of Navarra

and the Coastal Management Plan of Cantabria, to give just two examples), the European Landscape Convention and the Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+ documents.

In this way, local, regional and national authorities are beginning to become aware of the European context and of the importance of the EU's activities for their own geographical reality. Faced by this growing influence and importance, the authorities at the lower administrative scales have reacted by undertaking a strategic reflection on the position of their local or regional territory in Europe's economic geography and transport networks, as is the case of the aforementioned territorial plan for Andalucía. We are beginning to see the explicit integration of this European dimension in territorial planning (and marketing) documents, and human and financial resources are even being dedicated to European affairs, fundamentally with the aim of making the most of European funds and programmes (Dühr, Colomb and Nadin, 2010), originating normally from the instruments of cohesion policy. By way of example, we could cite the Office for European Cooperation set up by the Barcelona Provincial Council, whose aim, among others, is to offer technical and political support to local governments in the province of Barcelona in relation to the policies of the European Union. It also promotes the consolidation of the Network of Barcelona Municipalities for European Cooperation, which works as a tool for coordinating work between local governments on questions related to the EU and community policies that might be of interest at the local scale. In this way, it promotes the participation of the city halls in various transnational activities, offering an advisory service regarding the conception, preparation and management of projects of this type.

Therefore, regional, subregional and local entities are immersed in a process of adapting to the new situation created by the European authorities. Participation in trans-boundary or trans-national cooperation projects, as well as in the so-called "city networks", is becoming increasingly more widespread, so that numerous examples of such networks can be cited including: *Eurocities*, which brings together the local governments of more than 140 big cities from more than 30 European countries (including the Spanish cities of Madrid, Zaragoza and Málaga), and which has a direct influence on the work of the agents present in Brussels; *Quartiers en crise*, a network created in 1989 to revitalize depressed areas, and formed not only by public organisms but also non-governmental organisations, research teams, etc.; *World Carfree Network*, an initiative of the world car free movement (of which various Spanish associations are members) dedicated to promoting alternatives to the use of the

automobile in order to reduce its environmental impact, and which offers resources and urban solutions for professionals in the sector; *Telecities*, a European network of more than 120 local governments (including Bilbao, Cuenca and Sevilla in the case of Spain) which works for the development of urban areas using new information technologies; as well as other networks.

Thus, the response of local government to the changes to the European territory and to the evolution in community policies takes various forms, but these attempts always seek to adapt to this new situation in which the European dimension of spatial planning has been inserted at these lower scales too. And local governments frequently act via the adoption of European initiatives within the framework of the policy of territorial cohesion.

In principle, there are no signs of a European directive being issued on spatial planning in the near future, which means territorial cohesion can continue to channel most European initiatives related to this issue. Whatever the case, an intergovernmental debate needs to be called to discuss the basic principles of European territorial governance, which can serve to unify the Community's strategy for territorial cohesion with the member states' systems of territorial planning.

5. Final reflections

The European Union's regional or cohesion policy is one of its main policy areas in terms of budget expenditure. It is, moreover, one of the areas in which the Union has acquired greatest experience over the years, although its concerns and orientation have shifted with the signing of successive Treaties, in response to the prevailing needs and interests of the day. Thus, with the advent of a new global economic and political framework, and the recent neoliberal turn taken by the European Union, its cohesion policy has become a crucial instrument for strengthening the Lisbon Strategy.

This policy, conceived originally as a tool for tackling the regional disparities in the EU, gradually began to abandon the goal of a *balanced* European territory in favour of creating a *competitive* European territory. The idea of financial solidarity, which had underpinned this regional policy, became blurred with the introduction of new eligibility criteria to be fulfilled by the regions if they wished to aspire to the cohesion funds.

The problem, according to some authors, is that territorial cohesion is in reality an "umbrella" concept. It shares with the European model the dilemma of striving to attain certain goals (specifically, those of competitiveness and balanced development) that are not always easy to reconcile (Faludi, 2007). This explains why the concept is not particularly clear. And, thus, there is always the possibility of certain incompatibilities existing between the goals pursued by territorial cohesion (which in reality are also the general objectives of the EU). And, likewise, the risk exists that one of these competing objectives will attract greater attention or be considered more of a priority than another.

At the beginning of this century, cohesion policy appeared to have entered a period of stagnation, because of the doubts raised about its effectiveness and high costs. Furthermore, the regional disparities increased with each expansion of the EU and the new member states, whose per capita incomes were well below the EU mean, became the main recipients of the cohesion funds. The debate at the heart of the Union thus turned its attention to cohesion policy, and so it was decided that, if such a large share of the budget had to be dedicated to its maintenance, then it should be thoroughly overhauled. Thus, cohesion policy became a useful mechanism for promoting the competitiveness of areas with greatest economic potential. Since the EU gave its backing to the search for territorial competitiveness, as agreed to under the Lisbon Strategy, cohesion policy has succumbed to the "Lisbonisation" of Community policies, whose ultimate objective is to make the European economy the most competitive and dynamic in the world.

Since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, this policy of economic, social and territorial cohesion has become a *shared* competence of the European Union and its member states, making the realisation of this policy clearer in this new Treaty than it was in earlier accords. Moreover, the Union is obliged in all its policy making to take into consideration, at least in theory, the need to strengthen cohesion, since it now officially constitutes one of its principal objectives. This evolution in cohesion policy in recent years means that its actions often stray into the field of spatial planning, so that today it is often difficult to distinguish what constitutes actions of regional policy from those of spatial policy. As a result, territorial cohesion can be expected to play a fundamental role in Europe's future spatial planning. The fact that it is a shared policy means that the states lose competence whenever the Community exercises this power, limited that is by the principle of subsidiarity (González-Varas, 2004),

although it is possible that certain conflicts of competence might arise given that this limit is not always clearly defined.

The current political situation, however, is not the most favourable for avoiding conflicts of this type between governments operating at different scales. Europe is experiencing a period of change, with various cycles coming to a close - "a moment of transformation", as the European Commission itself has recognised[2]. The EU not only faces a major economic crisis, but also an institutional one (which peaked with Ireland's failure to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon), and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Union faces a crisis of confidence. In the corridors of power in Brussels proposals have been heard for the renationalization of some policies. And so, despite arguments in support of a European territorial policy, now does not appear to be an opportune moment to persuade member states to relinquish another quota of their sovereignty in favour of the Commission, be it via its cohesion policy or a new official territorial policy.

Whether the Commission is eventually able to implement its own spatial planning policy throughout Europe or not, there can be little doubt that the Commission already has an impact on the spatial planning of the territory of the EU's member states and their regions (Benabent, 2006). European policies, and its territorial policy is no exception, are exercising an increasingly greater influence on such policies at lower administrative levels. Territorial cohesion plays a central role in this Europeanisation of spatial planning since it gives the EU a great capacity to intervene in territorial questions and the Union has recourse to the necessary financial means to implement these programmes and projects. However, the conflicts that might arise from exercising its competence in matters of cohesion could well constitute a considerable obstacle. Thus, it is fundamental that there is adequate coordination between cohesion and the principle of subsidiarity, so as to guarantee a more effective policy of territorial cohesion (Janin Rivolin, 2005). In this sense, the strategic planning of the territory, as opposed to a normative approach, could serve as a solution for conflicts related to questions of sovereignty. In reality, from a relativist point of view of the territory, multiple and even contradictory perspectives are to be expected, and a strategic vision of the territory seems to be more useful in the European context than any enforced attempt to ensure that

[2] "A moment of transformation" is the title of the section which introduces the document "Europe 2020", published by the European Commission in March 2010. In this section, reference is made, among other issues, to the effects of the economic crisis, the challenges of the climate and natural resources and the ageing of the European population.

spatial planning becomes a private reserve at just one level (Faludi, 2003). Thus, this strategic and intergovernmental vision of the European territory could be the European Commission's best bet for planning the European space in the future.

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