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Conference Paper

Urban Areas and Territorial Cohesion Objective: Actual Strategies and Future Challenges

46th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Enlargement, Southern Europe and the Mediterranean", August 30th - September 3rd, 2006, Volos, Greece

Provided in Cooperation with:

European Regional Science Association (ERSA)

Suggested Citation: Servillo, Loris (2006) : Urban Areas and Territorial Cohesion Objective: Actual Strategies and Future Challenges, 46th Congress of the European Regional Science Association: "Enlargement, Southern Europe and the Mediterranean", August 30th - September 3rd, 2006, Volos, Greece, European Regional Science Association (ERSA), Louvain-la-Neuve

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/118463>

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Urban areas and EU territorial cohesion objective: actual strategies and future challenges

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Abstract

The EU's ever-tightening focus on the urban agenda has led, in recent years, to a clear recognition of cities as motors of regional, national and European development. Cities appears as crucial nodes, as centres of excellence of European territory, that can drive economic competitiveness and, at the same time, can forge territorial cohesion – itself an essential condition for the growth of long-term competitiveness.

The opportunity to pursue the territorial dimension of cohesion will take substance with the forthcoming programming period. As cities seem to be crucial for the aim of a more coherent spatial framework of European development, urban policies will be one of the pillar of the European strategy.

There are two major topics that have gained in importance to cities over the last decade: first, the evolving relationship between cities and the European Union, with a wide production of guidelines and EU raccomandations, and second, the rise of new forms of 'governance', be it at the local level or in the multi-level context of the European Union.

The paper faces the role of EU cities in relation to the EU territorial cohesion objective and tries to highlight the various topics, emerging from the EU praxis that seems relevant about urban policies. Reletad, to understand how future urban policies might support territorial cohesion, it is worth considering how key measures have been implemented and what kind of tipologies it is possible to identify.

The European territorial cohesion objective

The recent affirmation of "territorial cohesion" aim in the EU official documents seems to legitimate territorial actions at european level. The first appearance is in the treaty of Amsterdam. It refers about the allocating system of the EU resources and the services of general interest. By the way, the political principle is formally adopted in the Constitution Act. Nevertheless, territorial cohesion has not yet crystallised as a concept (Faludi & Waterhout, 2005d).

It seems strange to spend so much emphasis about the introduction of a concept inside a Constitutional Paper with such an unsure future. The concept is moreover ambiguous and with difficult definitions. Several authors affirm that the Territorial Cohesion is still searching for a commonly accepted definition, alluding to the principle as a black box (Waterhout and Zonneveld, 2005) or a not identified object (Faludi, 2005a) even if, however, political actions descend.

Anyway the affirmation of the territorial cohesion concept is the result of a wide making aware and studies on the territorial themes during the 1990s, especially in the second half of the decade, which completes a big cultural, technical and political work (Faludi 2001, Husson 2001, Janin Rivolin 2005, Camagni, 2004). A first important attempt to clarify the implications of the concept is

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contained in the Third Report on Cohesion (CEC 2004). Starting from here, several interpretations can be found, produced by the European scientific community or inside EU official documents.

The most interesting aspect of the debate is as such a vague aim can address European territorial policies. Territorial cohesion concept appears important because explicates a territorial assessment starting from the deep of EU identity. Indeed, some authors, recently, considered the territorial cohesion concept in tight relationship with the European model of society (Faludi 2005c), where the tension that characterizes so strongly the history and the European identity is nested.

The relationship of territorial cohesion and the aims of growth and sustainable development established in the "Lisbon- strategy", that it could seem contradictory, is a fundamental deepening field. The relationship preserves in his implications the tension between liberalism and welfare policies.

As Davoudi (2005) point out, the territorial cohesion borrows some elements of the European model of society: "It requires an extent of the (...)European model principles from individuals to places and territory. It requires the solidarity not only between European citizens, but also between European territories. It extends the request for a social protection based on work to a territorial protection based on places "(Davoudi 2005, p.4)"

Territorial cohesion seems to be able to explicate the territorial dimension in both the foreheads of the tension: from a side the achieving of development strategies needs to find a specific link with local resources, from other side the necessity of defending the territorial protection of places adds a territorial justice dimension to the European policy.

Whether territorial cohesion is one of the EU principle aim, territorial policies may be the operative instruments to pursue it. Thus it seems important to define the framework of operative implications and the strategies defined by the EU level about territory.

The main document about territorial strategies has been the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). According to the ESDP, the EU territory has differentiated structure and under different aspects is highly unbalanced. Indeed Europe appears characterized by one global economic integration zones, dubbed 'pentagon' (London-Paris-Milan-Munich-Hamburg). One of the most important aim of the territorial cohesion is to counterbalance the UE territory. This raises concerns about equity and about whether Europe makes full use of its potential. A key policy in the ESDP is thus polycentric development. (Davoudi 2003; Zonneveld *et al.* 2005, ESPON 2.3.1)

The policentric development marries visions of Member States from north and south emphasising competitiveness respectively cohesion. (Waterhout 2002) Next to polycentric development the ESDP puts forward two other guidelines: access to infrastructure and knowledge and careful management of natural and cultural heritage. The guidelines should be observed by national officials and in particular by the makers of EU sector policies, the latter having frequently unintended spatial impacts. Although dating from the 1990s, the ESDP continues to be of relevance to territorial cohesion policy. After all, rendering territorial cohesion operational in development strategies will mean invoking terms similar to those in the ESDP (Faludi & Waterhout, 2005d).

As the last evolution of debate shows, there is a strongly characterized relationship between territorial policy and sustainable development. The long run competitiveness cannot be burdened by territorial imbalances that would invalidate the local systems quality. At the same time, the collective wealth has, as first demonstration, a balanced territory, where potential conflicts given by cultural, social, environmental and economic differences are resolved. Therefore the sustainability is the final term with which the values of durability and integrated balance of the territorial aspects are transmitted (Camagni, 2004). In substance the territorial cohesion translates the balanced and sustainable development aim in territorial terms. (MIKR, 2004, Discussion Paper but also Final Declaration of the meeting).

The political aim of territorial cohesion, in the lower interpretation as operative tool, could be not too divergent from the actual cohesion policy. The aim transposes in terms of territorial fairness the redistribution and the accessibility to the general interest goods, trying to reduce the physical penalizations of the territory and his marginality. However there is also a richer interpretation, more connected with the EU aim of economic growth and sustainable development, that perceives more complex scenarios, contemplating different dynamics and territorial strategic policies.

According to the reacher version it is possible to affirm that the territorial cohesion appears like a principle which affects both spatial and sectorial policies, articulating a wide and variegated set of solicitations. Territorial cohesion, as political criterion with a consensus aim (Faludi, 2005a) and as principle that preserves an own processual dimension (Davoudi), cannot refer just to a static photograph of the territory and technical actions. The core aspect of the territorial justice theme applied to policies must foresee, as Waterhout and Zonneveld (2005) point out, not only a technical-quantitative evaluation but also a strategic interpretative approach to the European space. The work from which the paper is taken tries to divide the set of aims holden in the territorial cohesion concept in spatial, processual and performance:

<u><i>Spatial aims</i></u>
• Policentric development • Urban rural equilibrium • Preservation of natural and cultural heritage • Relationship between territory and infrastructural project
<u><i>Processual aims</i></u>
• a development model based on endogenous resources and territorial capital (Local Development) • the introduction of "territorial project" concept, at various scales (Spatial vision); • referring sectorial policies to a territorial dimension, increasing coordination between actions; • cooperation and networking
<u><i>Performance aims</i></u>
• the increasing of the value of social capital and involves local and regional actors; • equal accessibility to general services • reducing geomorfological disparities through well-defined infrastructural and infostructural networks • equality in social and employment opportunities • similar standards about quality of life

Moreover, territories are not a simple administrative dimensions on which sectorial policies add antropic acts. There is the necessity to define territorial dimensions on the basis of material and immaterial relationships. The EU level must pursue its aims through territorial governance actions, i.e.:

- exploring the chances of the territories;
- using the existing opportunities to improve territorial capital;
- pursuing greater cohesion and coordination between regional policies and sectorial policies;
- encouraging the cooperation and the networking, not necessarily based on proximity;
- supporting public-public and public-private partnership actions;
- stimulating the vertical and horizontal coordination.

The territorial cohesion dimensions

Territorial cohesion, conceived in his most complex political version, refers to various territorial and operating dimensions. About this topic, an important contribution comes from the Rotterdam Informal Meeting of EU Territorial Ministeries. The meeting has been the most direct meeting organized to define the operative meaning of territorial coesion.

The final document of the Rotterdam Meeting (MIKR, 2004) presented some interesting issues. It took note of demographic, economic, social and environmental problems, including the effects of climate change, global competitiveness and high energy prices. Ministers stressed territorial cohesion as strengthening competitiveness and reducing disparities. They observed that the diverse potentials of EU regions have been insufficiently taken into account in the Lisbon Strategy. Integrated spatial development approaches, enabling regions to exploit their endogenous potentials, can improve on its delivery. Ministers highlighted the increasing territorial impact of EU policies on member states and their regions. Inconsistencies between them reduce their effectiveness, though. Moreover, Ministers added that existing European instruments and procedures offered opportunities to develop such an approach on the basis of the concept of territorial cohesion. Ministers identified this as both a multisectoral and a multi-level concept. Faludi and Waterhout observe that “for the Commission, territorial cohesion – rather than spatial development – has become the name of the game” (Faludi & Waterhout, 2005d).

Turning back to the various dimensions of territorial cohesion, the final document of the Rotterdam Meeting (MIKR, 2004) presented some of them: the regional/national and the transregional and crossborder dimensions.

Fundamental assumption of this work is that cities are another important dimension directly involved in territorial cohesion objective.

Summarizing:

The *first dimension* can be the regional/national. Here the aim refers to the elimination of the imbalances and the disparities between areas considering fundamental the territorial diversity. Therefore development policies at regional and national level have to involve the territorial potentialities and the local capital. Moreover territorial cohesion means providing to the common public service conditions, both in terms of aid to the people and in terms of conditions for competitive development. The accessibility factors are fundamental, i.e. infrastructure equipment and networks of advanced telecommunication.

The *second dimension* binds the territorial cohesion concept to the connection between space systems: the economic connections and the social-cultural relationships define internal consistency (within the issue area) and the external connectivity. Indeed the territorial cohesion policy promotes the principal internal and external links (in the field of productive systems, information and knowledge, commerce and logistics etc.).

However, a *third dimension* should concern the urban areas. Cities are the base of the territorial structure and have a central role in the development policies. The way how urban areas articulate the space can be another index of the state of European territory. Indeed various attempts to build logical interpretative tools derive from that issue, some based on functional aspects (i.e. Functional Urban Areas) other based on phenomenological aspects (i.e. city-region). Therefore the further dimension of territorial cohesion objective can concern the urban structure in the territorial web (i.e. the polycentrism), multidimensional city networks and urban (reactive and proactive) policies.

The various dimensions and the respective policies constitute the framework of the European Spatial Planning. Moreover, cities can be considered the paradox of EU territory under various points of view and most of spatial planning policies tackle these urban issues.

The cities' paradoxes and EU spatial planning

City is often recognized as a territorial paradox: "The paradox is that cities concentrate both needs and opportunities" (CEC 2005, p.3) of the European territory. The urban paradox is one of the main challenge for all institutional level, and seem to represent in its all faces the lower dimension of territorial cohesion aim.

"On the one hand, they are the motors of growth in an increasingly global economy, concentrating wealth, knowledge and technical capacity. They are also centers for the provision of public services, such as education, healthcare and transportation. At the same time however, many of the worst problems society faces today are concentrated in urban areas, including economic and social exclusion, degradation of the natural and built environment, congestion, crime, intolerance and racism, and loss of local identity" (DG Regio, 2003, p.1).

"Cities are places where the juxtaposition of success and failure, growth and decline, innovation and stagnation, wealth and poverty, great architecture and environmental deterioration poses a major challenge to the social cohesion of Europe. Linking increasing economic competitiveness to increasing social inclusion is a crucial challenge for policy-makers at all levels of government and all social partners in all European countries" (MIKR, 2004, p.1).

"Cities encompass significant disparities in economic and social opportunities. These can be spatial (between neighbourhoods) or social (between different groups) and often both" (CEC 2005, p.3). By the way the spatial complexity reveals a disparity distribution that seems to follow a fractal pattern. "In fact, disparities are often greater between neighbourhoods *within* a given city than *between* cities" (CE 2005, p.3).

Territorial cohesion and urban paradox places a double challenge to the European policies, along the evolution path in the last programming period. On one side, there is the first typology of intervention supported by EU Structural Funds Programs, i.e. the PIC URBAN: reactive actions has been used to tackle fiscal and social problems and to diminish disparities (social, economic, ambiental, cultural, institutional). On the other side, proactive actions are growing, with the aim of enforcing the urban competitiveness in the global market.

The difference between the two extremes of urban paradox characterizes national urban policies. Some members states see the planning policies as space as a means to keep the balance inside the national urban system, while others place several attention to the international competitive position of the principal urban areas. Nevertheless, in more than one decade, the Structural Funds Programs has seen in all Member State a shifting of urban policies from reactive towards proactive characteristics (Polverari and Bechtler, 2005).

EU policy pushed towards this direction. In fact the message contained in the official literature usually insists in a urban polycentric weft as structure for an European territory where urban pole can be deal with the challenges of globalization. It pursues a territory where cities are based on sustainable communities, where development strategies are not only prerogative of big urban areas but also of medium-little towns, and where the urban-rural coalition guarantees a durable balance. Jointly, new forms of governance are emerging from these strategies.

At least, there are two major topics that have gained in importance to cities over the last decade: first, the evolving relationship between cities and the European Union, and second, the rise of new forms of 'governance', be it at the local level or in the multi-level context of the European Union (Antalovsky et al., 2005).

The first topic highlights how European integration has led to an involvement of cities in policies devised at the European level. In many respects metropolitan regions and cities have become the concrete, practical testing grounds for EU rules, strategies and programmes. The EU offers both opportunities to gain from policies geared towards local level development, but also new constraints emanating from European regulative frameworks. For cities the EU has emerged as a new political arena.

Most of the cities have long been trying to establish a direct relationship with the EU level and to elevate their role in EU decision-making. However, in spite of the growing visibility of cities as actors on the European stage and of urban issues in EU policies and the pervasiveness of the European Union in local affairs the effects, processes and democratic quality of these interactions are not yet well understood.

The second topic is the rise of new forms of 'governance' involving public policies at the local, national and international levels. The general term 'governance' refers to the totality of collective regulation that occurs within society, going beyond traditional government by the state. "Notions of 'new forms of governance' in the public realm therefore describe any development that either points to changes in the traditional, state-centred way of delivering public policies in the domestic context, or to the emergence of public policy-making in the absence of government in the international context" (Antalovsky et al., 2005, p.10).

In all instances however, 'new governance' is concerned with "'soft' forms of policy-making based on voluntary commitment, coordination in place of authoritative instruction, and subordination to common goals without the threat of legal sanctions in the event of non-obedience" (Antalovsky et al., 2005, p.10).

Thus a particular mode of coordinating action among political subjects marks one important difference between these new forms of governing and traditional, hierarchic government based on central authority. Another refers to the actors involved in policy-making: 'new governance' implies the participation of non-state actors – like business enterprises, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or particular citizen groups and networks – in the formulation, decision and implementation of public policies. 'Hybrid' or 'new' forms of governance emerge where non-state actors not only influence the actions taken by the state, but actually co-govern with the state.

The urban policy debate

The first topic regarding urban issues has always been at the center of the European attentions, despite the lack of direct competences. On the one side the subsidiarity principle invokes an active role of the urban areas, on the other side the strong urban characterization of the European continent doesn't allow the theme to be eluded in the various competence areas. There are some important acts which mark the relation between EU policy and urban areas. We could identify 3 important elements:

- the regeneration programs in urban context, which are the most direct EU intervention (PIC URBAN and the Urban Pilot Projects);
- the huge patrimony of city networks and exchange experiences (i.e. Eurocities, Urbact, EUKN, etc.);
- the environmental policy dedicated to the sustainability of urban areas; (i.e. programs of the DG Environment like Life programs, Ag.21 etc).

There is also another point: the production of documents inherent cities and the urban policy related to EU objectives. Through this literary production, the EU has built what Cremaschi (2005, p.106) defined the "stratified community jargon" which has "discursive formations" that, far from being purely rhetoric, are the lever that some actors can invoke for the formation of operative strategies. EU policies grow around these articulated and apparently plane discursive formations.

If the most important, ambitious, and for certain directions innovative document about territorial strategies is the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), there is also a wide literature produced by the European institutions dedicated specifically to the urban politics. It represents an articulated improvement process during which aims and methods of urban policies have been defined.

The first interesting documents had been elaborated toward the forthcoming programming period 2000-06: in 1997 the Communication of the Commission "Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union"; in 1998 the document discussed in Vienna "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework to Action"; in November 2000 the Urban Agenda is adopted in Lille.

After a pause, owed to the beginning of the new phase and to the shift of interests toward the Lisbon Strategy, the debate takes off around the middle term of programming period, once again in the perspective of the next Structural Funds Programme. In the 2004 the draft Structural Funds regulations synthetizes the previous communications about urban policies and translates them in addresses for the forthcoming period, while the Third Report highlight the infrastructures-urban areas relationship, further the other themes already present in the Agenda about european cities.

Urban policies issue emerges more explicitly during the Dutch semester of 2004 in the City Summit, in Noordwijk in 2004 (the previous summits were in London 2002 and in Milan 2003). A rich *discusson paper* was presented, with a set of proposals with which the theme of urban competitiveness was bound to the sustainable development.

The Ministers recommended that a series of commitments should be made to act upon the policy messages and achieve the aspects of the Lille programme by all national and European partners:

- Despite the diversity of national circumstances, member states should accept the key principles of successful urban policies. These included: balancing social need with economic opportunity, integrating sectoral policies, providing long term mainstream resources for cities, fully engaging community and private sectors, linking deprived neighbourhoods to their wider territories, encouraging city-regional collaboration, encouraging a balanced, polycentric urban system, encouraging good policy practice, learning and capacity.
- An effective social inclusion policy required the integration of a range of policy sectors. The contribution of cities and local authorities to social inclusion must be recognised and strengthened by national governments. National Action Plans should acknowledge the added value of the area based, integrated approach by local authorities.
- National sectoral policies should be better integrated to recognise and strengthen the knowledge economy and the role cities play in it as engines of growth.
- Member states value the exchange of knowledge between member states, regions and cities. URBACT and the Urban Audit should both be used to facilitate this process.
- Many partners would value the creation of a European Knowledge platform, to link existing networks and exchange or practical and innovative best practices on all levels.
- The EU should be more aware of the impact of their sectoral policies upon cities, which would require greater cooperation between different DGs.
- Member states should give greater attention to the new needs arising from expansion, improving inadequate physical infrastructure, encouraging sustainable development and meeting the economic and social challenges faced by ethnic minority communities and young people in European cities.
- Member states should recognise and develop the potential of city regions to generate sustainable social cohesion and economic competitiveness of functional urban areas.

The intents of the meeting represent an ambitious statement of European policy for urban areas. It made obvious that the debate about European urban policy has come a long way from the tentative initiatives raised by the European Commission in the 1990s.

However, political discussions during the forthcoming period defined more deeply the urban issues in the EU agenda. Indeed, on June 2005 in Saarbrücken, during the "Urban future" conference, a common declaration of representatives of European cities, Urban actors, and city networks has been signed. It fixes the points of the Communitarian Urban Aquis, in order to be integrated in the next programming period.

At last the most important and recent result of the efforts to pursue a explicit a tool for urban policies in the European agenda is a Communication of the Commission dated November 2005 titled "Cohesion policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the region".

The recent Commission's document lists the important points to make efficient the cities role in the achievement of the growth aim for the next programming. In particular it recommends to:

- make the cities more attractive (i.e. operating on mobility, transport and physical accessibility, accessibility to services and amenities, physical and natural environment, cultural sector);
- support policies in the field of innovation, entrepreneurship and knowledge economy;
- increase the work opportunities and knock down the unemployment rate;
- fight the internal disparities of the urban areas and between different towns;
- build a background of urban and territorial governance;
- keep on investing in the urban requalification.

The possibility of directing the expense of Structural Funds toward growth strategies and sustainable development needs the important role of the national level, in particular in the definition of the territorial strategies on the basis of a territorial governance method. It is necessary that a transcalar approach could be also count on national overview, able to define the balance between reactive and proactive strategies in a spatial context.

The urban governance

With regard to the notion of 'governance', the second topic previously highlighted, it is possible to chart the meaning to cities of various dimensions and variants of territorial governance.

There are a lot of possible understandings and focus for governance concept. However it is possible to find an adjusted meaning for territorial and urban governance, as synonymous of *new modes of planning*. In this prespective, governance can be considered as a way to co-ordinate economic and social dynamics through the involment and the participation of multiplicity of actors, thus modifying both policies and interventions objective and action procedures, with a spatial framework.

The territorial governance is the ability of key private and public actors to build organisational consensus, agree on contribution of each partner and agree on a common spatial vision. (Espon 2.3.2.). It means to built an organisational consensus, with the possibility ot involve also the private sector, in order to define common objectives and tasks in the field of spatial and economic developement.

"Re-orientteering urban and territorial policies towards the promotion of local development is resumed by many authors as the rise of the entrepreneurial city or "turn" to the interpreneuial mode of urban governance, debating the shift from regulative action modes to *pro-active* ones supporting development, stress that relation that link the changes in urban and territorial policies to the current redefinition of the economic development model" (Espon 2.3.2. FIR, p.106).

These ambits of urban issues, linked with EU dimensions, introduce another topic and complete the dimensions of territorial cohesion (MIKR, 2004). The concept of territorial governance is not too divergent from the acutal concept of spatial development, and strong related to that of territorial cohesion. Indeed spatial development does not imply a social structure of the territory (traditional idea of nation-state) but it evokes agreement between stakeholders (pubblic and private alike, and in the area of economy, public facilities or infrastructure) to ensure the spatial coherence of the different actions. According to Bagnasco and Le Galès (2000, p.26) urban and territorial

governance is “a process of co-ordinating actors, social groups and institutions in order to reach objectives which have been collectively discussed and defined in fragmented, even nebulous environments”.

Territorial governance has territory as object and aims to regulate and to manage (and thus to govern) territorial dynamics, through the coordination of actions done by a multiplicity of actors (Espo 2.3.2.). According to ESPON research about territorial governance and the research “Cities in Europe- Europe in the Cities” (Antalovsky et al., 2005) it is possible to identify different forms concerning urban governance at different scale:

Vertical governance

a degree of decentralization and *multi-level governance* of European policies through sub-national level of democracy and public intervention; this entails a shift from traditional hierarchical relationships between national, regional and local authorities towards partnership-based shared policy development and joint implementation.

Horizontal governance

new horizontal forms of urban governance. This entails to govern through broad, complex and informal coalitions of public and non-public actors. As decision-powers of the local authority are increasingly shared with non-governmental interests, the municipality adapts to a new role of steering, mediating or facilitating policy processes. Furthermore, horizontal governance encompasses the creation of new networks including actors from the political-administrative system, from (neo-) corporatist organisations, the business sector and civil society. Horizontal governance structures can also emerge within the domain of public administration, as new forms of cross-departmental cooperation.

Participation

There are new ways for incorporating actors from civil society in political decision-making at the local level. New participatory arrangements and participation processes increase the access to local political-administrative systems for citizens possessing different economic, social and cultural capital. Networks among public authorities, social partners, non-governmental and community organisations as well as private business further reinforce citizen involvement.

Policy learning

Cooperation and changes of best practices allow cities to introduce new policies and adapt innovative measures. Policy learning can take a vertical form, where principles embodied in the EU policies are “downloaded” and lead to policy modernisation. In its horizontal form, EU policies facilitate the creation of new networks among cities and the transfer of best practices between them. In another variant, EU programmes serve as catalyst and enabler for endogenous policy innovation.

Obviously the territorial governance actions are shaped by pre-existing national, regional and local institutions (both formal and informal, like the prevailing political culture). The specific context thus conditions and constrains the response of individual cities/metropolitan areas to the potential local governance effect of the EU dynamics.

By the way, it could be possible to organize, in a first draft version, trends that involve EU urban policies in different geographic dimensions:

- EU level (polycentric system of cities)
- Crossborder/transnational level (urban networks)
- Regional level (cluster of cities, City regions)

- Urban level (“traditional” urban field as regenerating policies, proactive strategies, sectorial policies)

Notes

The paper represents a summary of both the wide theoretical context in which the PhD thesis is collocate and some first assumptions.

The research is going to compare some urban case studies in order to identify some trend and evolution. It will be use a cross analysis between the different issues highlighted in the text. In particular it will focus same case studies crossing themes underlined within the territorial cohesion debate, the EU urban approaches, and differnt forms and scales of urban governance.

The work will be referred to case studies of ESPON project 2.3.1 and 2.3.2. that at the moment are not yet completed.

The author is part of EU-POLIS, Politecnico di Torino, a research group involved in the core team of these Espon projects.

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