



EDITORIAL: EU POST-2020 TERRITORIAL POLICIES?

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The European Union (EU) is a relatively mature political project which has played a crucial role in supporting territorial development policies across Europe, mainly through Cohesion Policy and its related programmes and projects. But, as the recent 'BREXIT' and 'Covidfencing' processes have demonstrated, the EU project can easily be derailed by migrant and pandemic phobias, leading to a rise of extremist and nationalist movements. In this context, this volume dedicated to the potential implications of EU post-2020 territorial policies for the Union's territorial development and cohesion, as well as a more sustainable and integrated policy approach, comes at a crucial moment when these policies – as imbued with a greener, integrated and inclusive character – are about to be implemented. Despite the many problems associated with living through the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, this Issue of Europa XXI has proved able to attract renowned European experts on EU policies, who have delivered a fresh and updated conceptual and methodological overview of crucial policy arenas related to post-2020 EU policies.

In the first contribution, the Editor of this Issue (Medeiros, 2020) puts forward a novel scientific concept (of territoriality), which is understood as a process by which policies have a territorially-driven policy-design, implementation and evaluation paradigm incorporated into them. By doing this, the author seeks to highlight the advantages accruing from this territorially-driven design when it comes to mainstream econometric perspectives, as supported by 'growth' policy rationales, rather than those centring around 'development' or 'cohesion'. Following an analysis of EU Cohesion Reports, and such Programmes of the Union as ESPON, the author identifies and highlights an EU policy concern that the said territoriality approach should be applied to some of the policies they finance, with this witnessed *inter alia* in the ESPON and European Territorial Cooperation Programmes, as well as the increasing attention paid to Territorial Impact Assessment methodologies in assessing the main impacts of EU-related policies and programmes. However, a reading of the EU Cohesion Reports also shows clearly how territoriality remains the poor relation of EU policies (i.e. Cohesion Policy) – when it comes to both analysis of implementation and assessment of main effects by the Commission.

In the second contribution included here, P. Neto discusses the European Green Deal and the Territorial Agenda 2030, as well as the future of the place-based approach in the new EU policy framework set in the COVID-19 context. All of these are initiatives in need of analysis and assessment, given their crucial potential role where the future of the EU project is concerned. In that regard, the author concludes that the place-based approach is safeguarded by EU Cohesion

Policy 2021-2027, as it ‘continues to attach great importance to the need to ensure a more tailored approach to regional development and to supporting locally-led development strategies’ (Neto, 2020, p. 46). Likewise, Neto reckons that the European Green Deal, the EU Digital Strategy, the EU Circular Economy Action Plan, the EU Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, and the European strategy to implement UN SDG 2030 all require a territorialised and place-based approach if they are to encompass the needs of all EU regions in regard to territorial development.

Next in order is an article written by five experts on the Baltic Sea Region (i.e. J. Zaucha, D. Pyć, K. Böhme, L. Neumann, and D. Aziewicz), who debate the EU’s macro-regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region post-2020. This is a matter of particular interest and relevance, not only because of the focus on the EU’s first macro-regional experience, but also because the analysis offers an update on Strategy achievements and shortcomings (from an economic perspective above all). The authors conclude that the ‘EUSBSR is a valuable policy tool contributing to the creation of relational and social capital for the BSR’, even as they also recognise the limited influence on the behaviour and decisions of private actors involved, as well as the way in which flagship projects ‘should be based on a high-level political commitment anchored if possible in international agreements that bring together both national and international funding and resources supported by national parliaments’ (Zaucha, Pyć, Böhme, Neumann & Aziewicz, 2020, p. 70-71).

The fourth contribution is authored by T. Perrin and is centred on the potential macro-regionalisation of the Western Mediterranean. Crucially, while strategies addressing four EU macro-regions (of the Baltic Sea, the Danube, the Alpine Region and the Adriatic & Ionian Region) are already ongoing, there remains territorial space for other potential macro-regional experiments of a similar nature. In this context, the author starts by claiming that there is no ‘proper’ EU macro-regional strategy for the Western Mediterranean. He then develops his argument, on the basis of indicators and previous studies, in this way uncovering various potentialities and deadlocks of macro-regionalisation for this particular transnational territory of the EU. In light of the above, he concludes that ‘the Western Mediterranean presents social, economic or political indicators that can favour macro-regional cooperation, especially if we consider the intensity of territorial cooperation in the area’ (Perrin, 2020, p. 93).

The fifth paper, written by J. Magone, explores and debates, with a critical eye, the logic of EU Cohesion Policy, with a special emphasis on the core-periphery divide and the impact on European Integration. Supported by a dissertation over two distinct analytical perspectives that dominate Cohesion Policy (i.e. those of Europe and given countries), the author goes on to reveal that the monetary policy rationale of simply pouring money ‘into southern, central, and eastern Europe is the wrong policy for these countries’ (Magone, 2020, p. 112). Instead, a ‘result-oriented mentality and a focus on entrepreneurship can counteract this dangerous prospect’ (p. 112). Alongside, he portends that strategic national development vision is needed to help each country position itself within an ever-more globalised world dominated by Asia. In the end, the author sees the future of the EU as depending on how it competes in a global arena, so as not to be left behind in a more and more competitive world. This would denote an undermining of the current transfer of funds to non-competitive peripheries.

The next paper in order, by AEBR Secretary-General M. Guillermo Ramírez is one that we perceive as more manifesto and collection of inside knowledge than typical article. However, it will prove of particular interest and relevance to researchers focusing on cross-border cooperation policies and processes, given the profound injection of knowledge collected over the years by someone with close political contacts with the EU, national and regional entities forging the Union’s territorial cooperation processes. Indeed, in debating integrated territorial-cooperation

approaches to post-2020 EU policies, the author provides unique insight into the current process of negotiation of these EU policies, offering a knowledgeable perspective that ensures the appeal of his article to those seeking an updated notion on how EU cross-border cooperation is going to proceed in upcoming years. This is particularly important in a current context marked by processes of 'Covidfencing' that, in the view of the author, only offer new reasons 'to preserve and even strengthen European territorial cooperation' (Guillermo Ramírez, 2020).

Authored by M. Klatt, a known expert on border studies, and I. Winkler, the eighth paper of this Issue provides a critical analysis on post-2020 Interreg. Once again, this is an article focusing in on EU territorial cooperation processes, and in particular that strand achieving wider EU political and financial visibility since the first Interreg Community Initiative was implemented (in 1990). Starting their analysis with a recognition of the persistence of borders as barriers within the EU, the authors suggest that novel EU cross-border strategies 'could be better aligned with long-term, cross-border economic strategies to create sustainable cross-border development', and that 'it will be important to rethink Interreg in a less project-oriented, but more strategically oriented direction; focusing on flows and institutional settings promoting the development of flows by reducing cross-border barriers' (Klatt & Winkler, 2020, p. 139). Indeed, a wealth of studies and data on persisting cross-border obstacles in Europe allow it to go almost without saying that future EU cross-border cooperation programmes should have a focus on the maximum possible mitigation of these obstacles, in order that more-integrated EU territory can be achieved.

Finally, our Issue is brought to a close by a contribution from four young authors (C. N. Henriques, S. Dragović, C. Auer and I. Gomes), who offer a critical analysis of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and several previous territorially-driven strategic documents of the EU (appearing between 1983 and 2020 and being of a similar nature). The paper looks especially timely, given that the Territorial Agenda 2030 was signed only very recently (on December 1, 2020), and is now the subject of very broad debate across Europe. By analysing concepts relating to the environment, inequality, justice, sustainability, territory and transition, the authors conclude that the Territorial Agenda 2030 'conceptual framework did not offer enough clarity and specificity to maintain the necessary ethical and political stance to sustain this hermeneutical goal (Henriques, Dragović, Auer & Gomes, 2020). For that reason, the authors fear that the Territorial Agenda 2030 may follow its predecessors in ultimately being just another invisible and ineffective strategic report on policy.

A first striking observation from the content of the papers making up this Issue concerns the many challenges lying ahead for any sound and more territorialised implementation of EU policies post-2020. A salient point here would be the crucial role the academic community working on territorial policies has to play in demonstrating the added value of more-territorial (integrated, holistic) strategic visions and development-policy agendas by which to implement policies *vis-à-vis* mainstream econometric visions (the growth rationale). One crucial step in this direction could be a more pro-active involvement of all EU member states in the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030, with Cohesion Policy then coming to be used as a development/cohesion policy tool, as opposed to the investment tool it has become in recent decades.

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