



THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030: TOWARDS A COMMON LANGUAGE? A REVIEW OF A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. The Territorial Agenda 2030 aims to provide multi-level strategic orientation to increase cohesion and overcome the 21st century pressing challenges. In multilingual contexts, the ideas and concepts communicated in such agendas must be clear and well-defined. In our study, we conducted a content analysis of the concepts of *environment*, *inequality*, *justice*, *sustainability*, *territory* and *transition* in contrast with former versions of this agenda. We found that, since 1983, the Territorial Agenda conceptual framework changed significantly in its meaning and semantic universe of reference.

Keywords: Territorial Agenda 2030, TA 2030, environment, inequality, justice, sustainability, territory, transition.

Introduction

The Territorial Agenda (TA 2030; EU Ministers, 2020a) is a strategic policy framework jointly formulated by all European member states and some European Institutions. While the first Territorial Agenda was only published in 2007, earlier efforts had prepared the ground for making this agenda possible, as is the case of the Torremolinos Charter (COE, 1983) and the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC, 1999) documents. Today, the TA 2030 aims to provide multi-level strategic orientation to increase territorial cohesion and overcome the 21st century pressing challenges, such as social inequalities, environmental risks and, most recently, pandemic-related societal consequences. In order to achieve this aim, with political consensus from all actors involved on several levels of governance, as well as to foster commitment in its implementation, the TA 2030 takes into consideration several other policy frameworks and agendas, such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), the New Leipzig Charter (EU Ministers, 2020b) and the European Green Deal (EC, 2019), among others (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 3).

The European territory, however, could be described as a palimpsest of different languages, cultures, religions and other significant identities (Uricchio, 2009) contributing to the imperative that is imposed on policy agendas such as the TA 2030, of creating or maintaining a common language (or at least a common semantic universe and conceptual framework of reference). This goal is unequivocally imperative for the agenda's success, as its final version was just accepted by the ministers last December 1st, 2020, with the launch of six pilot actions. This date concluded a revision process started in 2015, meaning that the study of how the agenda's message is conveyed is timely and critical to its implementation in these six pilot actions. This message, despite the TA 2030 being a political document that must gather political consensus, we claim, must use clear and accessible language to all the stakeholders involved in innovative territorial policies and actions in this political cycle. Consequently, we argue that the ideas, concepts and terminology used in the TA 2030 should be consistent with its former versions. In this study we conduct a content analysis of six driving concepts of the TA 2030's discourse, namely *environment*, *inequality*, *justice* (Just Europe), *sustainability* (Green Europe), as well as *territory*, and *transition*.

The methodology of content analysis employed in our study reflects our goal to inspect if the meaning of the abovementioned six words had suffered any changes across the former versions of the TA and its predecessor documents (Table 1).

Table 1. The overview of the previous versions of the TA and its predecessor documents

Document	Adopted by	Year of adoption	Published by
Torremolinos Charter	Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT)	1983	Council of Europe
The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP)	Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning	1999	European Commission
Territorial Agenda of the European Union (TA)	Ministers responsible for spatial planning and development	2007	European Commission
Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (TA 2020)	Ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development	2011	European Commission
Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2030 (TA 2030)	Ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development and/or territorial cohesion	2020	European Commission

Source: authors' own elaboration, based on the surveyed documents.

Drawing on the methodological framework proposed by former pioneering studies merging content analysis legislation and policy studies (Howland, Becker & Prelli, 2006; Hall & Steiner, 2020), our study used the entire text of all the documents listed in Table 1 and seven other reference documents¹ as primary source material to then conduct a relational analysis (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010) of these selected concepts with their semantic context. The goal to study contextual meaning and its evolution, furthermore, reflects a hermeneutic conscience (Palmer, 1969, p. 323-338) without which we believe a read of a strategic political document would be incomplete from a social science lens.

¹ For this exercise we reviewed the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the United Nations' Paris Agreement (2015); the European Commission's 2020 European Green Deal; the European Commission's 2020 Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Just Transition Fund, the EU Council's New Leipzig Charter (2020); the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (2017); the Council of the European Union's Urban Agenda for the EU (also known as 'Pact of Amsterdam') (2016) and the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT) Spatial Development Glossary (2007).

The results presented allow for a quantitative analysis as well as a qualitative assessment of the semantic universes associated with these terms (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of mentions of 6 concepts in European territorial policy documents

Theme	Documents	Concepts					
		Environment	Inequality	Justice	Sustainability	Territory	Transition
Territorial development	Territorial Agenda 2030 (2020)	22	14	10	46	103	30
	Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 (2011)	13	1	–	23	169	1
	Territorial Agenda of the EU (2007)	8	–	–	19	67	–
	European Spatial Development Perspective (1999)	125	–	–	86	82	1
	Torremolinos Charter (1983)	11	–	–	–	2	–
Sustainable development	European Green Deal (2020)	73	–	11	82	2	52
	New Leipzig Charter (2020)	9	2	7	16	10	–
	Urban Agenda for the EU (2016)	7	–	–	25	37	4
	Habitat III – New Urban Agenda 2030 (2016)	45	5	1	162	40	5
	The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)	34	10	–	126	–	1
	Spatial Development Glossary (2007)	69	–	–	44	183	2

Source: authors' own elaboration.

Why the concepts of environment, inequality, justice, sustainability, territory and transition?

The present study stems from a previous collective commentary, published and authored by the same team, in January 2020, when the first draft of the TA 2030 was up for public consultation. When analysing the TA for the first time, a few questions were raised and discussed among team members, specifically regarding these six concepts, namely:

- 1) the draft TA 2030's definition of environment seemed hazy and difficult to be operationalized when compared to former versions;
- 2) the definition of inequality was implicit and unclear, especially because it seemed now to replace the concept of poverty, formerly addressed consistently by versions such as the 1999 European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). Additionally, while in the 1999 ESDP the discourse was focused on spatial disparities – which emphasizes the differences between specific territories – in the TA 2030 version, this concern seemed to now be addressed by introducing the term spatial inequalities – for instance, the TA 2030 demonstrates concern for the future devel-

opment of territories lagging behind but only insofar as to help them achieve means to increase competitiveness, while in the 1999 ESDP we can read that call for this type of logic might actually contribute to perpetuate inequalities between countries (CEC, 1999, p. 7-8);

- 3) the idea of justice, implicit in the slogan Just Europe, left few traces of specific, goal-oriented steps to make sense of it as a strategic objective – we found, for example, contradicting goals taking centre stage under the same umbrella term, such as a ‘beneficial digitalisation of society’ without further explicit concern on controlling the exploration of natural resources necessary to achieve it;
- 4) the lack of clarity on central topics – for instance, the sentence ‘these demographic dynamics (ageing, domestic and intra-EU migration, others) have severe social implications incl. increasingly social exclusion and inequalities, challenges for public service provision, labour markets and housing’ (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 6) lacks clarity in its argument: does it imply that the housing problem is a consequence of inevitable (ageing) demographic dynamics? Or is the housing problem a consequence of migratory movements? – makes this agenda of little use when actual, contextual operationalisation is needed, particularly by non-political actors at the micro governance levels;
- 5) the idea of sustainability, associated with the slogan Green Europe, registers similar problems, namely when associated with the idea of transition – what transition can be beneficial if the path towards a more sustainable Europe does not account for funding for experimental, local and micro-level initiatives or without strong regulatory orientation? There is enough literature associated with movements such as the UK’s Transition Towns to demand more preparedness for the necessary small, achievable steps towards sustainable management of natural resources, strongly supported by indigenous and local knowledge and complexity awareness – an approach that an attentive reader can find in the 1999 ESDP document;
- 6) the idea of territory, lastly, was used much more explicitly in 1999 than in 2020. Even with an assumed spatial approach, the word territory was used in the 1999 ESDP to refer to the geopolitical dimension of the EU space. For instance, in the TA 2030, the territorial agenda doesn’t address why the message assumes a territorial perspective and, when describing those involved in the territorial governance process, describes the process plainly as spatial planning.

Because each of these concepts raised specific concerns regarding its use across the different versions of the TA, this study was motivated by the team’s concerns that without specific conceptual or practical orientation to tackle the complex issues addressed by the TA, certain narratives can give room to policy that, in the name of urgency, might lead to unpredictable consequences which, ultimately, might compromise the very purpose this agenda aims to foster – such as policies built on narratives and discourses that seem consistent with a European progressive, collective project, but in fact maintain industry monopolies that halt an actually clean, sustainable future.

Keyword 1: Environment

The concept of environment is used in many different ways in the analysed documents: as one of the three pillars of sustainable development defined by the Brundtland Report (1987), to refer to the totality of natural resources (air, water, soil and biodiversity) simultaneously or even just as a particular context. In our analysis we searched through this universe of uses in the chosen documents, identifying how often and where it was applied to then reflect on the trend we acknowledge it has when related with territorial matters, especially with the latest version of the TA 2030.

In Torremolinos Charter (COE, 1983) the concept of environment is used 11 times, often to underline the importance of and the connection between spatial planning, environmental protection and the quality of life. The ESDP (CEC, 1999) focuses on environmental policy, using a version of the term environment a total of 125 times and emphasizing the importance of the protection of natural areas. The Territorial Agenda (EU Ministers, 2007a) refers to the term eight times, and underlines the environmental benefits of polycentric territorial development and European territorial integration. For instance, a point is made of the ‘decentralized (...) and environmentally friendly production of renewable energy, [while] environmentally and culturally oriented development’ (EU Ministers, 2007a, p. 7) is encouraged in the economically underdeveloped regions. There is a sense of the need to show how territorial integration proposed by this document will have benefits in multiple areas, preservation of the natural environment being one of them. Territorial Agenda 2020 (EU Ministers, 2011) brings up the risks of environmental problems, referring at different points to the natural, cultural and built environment. It stresses the importance of environmental quality (implying the ecological considerations), as well as the need for improving business environment and environmentally friendly job creation. The total number of mentions of some variant of the term environment is 13. The newest territorial agenda, TA 2030 (EU Ministers, 2020a) uses the word 22 times, often bringing it into connection with the words challenges, risks and pressures, in addition to environmental degradation (and environmental fragmentation). It seems the document strives to convey a concern over the current state of the natural environment. Still, the agenda also brings up a notion of places with ‘good entrepreneurial and natural environments’ which ‘tend to have better economic performance’, but fails to make an explicit connection as to how such good environments are achieved and what forces prevent certain places from achieving them.

When analysing how the word environment was used in the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 (UN, 2015), we found it to be used as the third axis of a tripartite system – economic, social and environmental – a total of six times, throughout the text; we found it used in association with health or human health in about three different instances; we found it used with a contextual meaning – as nurturing or enabling – a total of four times; and as a pre-requisite for the sound management of economic, industrial or technological purposes a total of nine times. Furthermore, the word environment was also used in this text as an object of protection or degradation on four occasions; and as an object subjected to external impacts in five different moments. What we can conclude from this analysis is that the idea of environment is mostly used as either a context or a prerequisite for societal structures without a clear and positive definition of what it is. While, paradoxically, it appears as one of three overarching elements of sustainable development, one cannot clearly grasp how environment is being conceptualized in this document, nor can we find evidence of its ontological autonomy. While we agree that different understandings of environment coexist, we find this lack of clarity particularly problematic when attempting to orient specific action-oriented strategies – as is the goal of the TA 2030 – as it does not provide clear boundaries to guide, for instance, evaluation of said actions or strategies.

Despite environment being intimately related with sustainability – as it is most often referred to in the TA documents – its mentions are scarce. This can be related, in one hand, to the fact of environmental matters sometimes being referenced individually – as air, water, soil or biodiversity – but, on the other hand, also with the lack of a clearer definition of the concept itself and how it should be used in this kind of documents focusing territorial matters. We acknowledge this through the many uses that are given to the word environment and also by the more recent adoption of the green concept as a reference to environmental matters in the TA 2030 (EU Minis-

ters, 2020a). Nevertheless, it is worth noting the increasing use of this concept: from 10 mentions in the Torremolinos Charter, 4 in the TA (2007), 12 in the TA 2020 (2011) and 22 in the TA 2030 (2020). This seems to indicate the possibility of the recognition of its importance without, however, demonstrating a deeper reflection on its meaning. Besides all of this, the latest version of the TA, mentions the environment more often as a risk or a challenge rather than the planetary circumstances of the world we live in.

Keyword 2: Inequality

The concept of inequality is, overall, absent from the main documents surveyed in this analysis, aside from TA 2030 (EU Ministers, 2020a). Torremolinos Charter (COE, 1983) does not mention the term inequality at all, and the same is true for ESDP (CEC, 1999) and TA (EU Ministers, 2007a). These documents, however, engage with the ideas of social, economic and territorial cohesion, employing different terminology to express the commitment to the development of the entire Europe.

Torremolinos Charter underlines the importance of improving the quality of life, while calling for peripheral areas to be better connected to the industrial and economic centres of Europe and for special policies to be developed in favour of regions in decline (COE, 1983, p. 8). The ESDP proposes specific actions to fight urban poverty and social segregation, including provision of inexpensive, high-quality housing and planting urban gardens. The TA (2007) does not refer to either poverty or inequality but stresses the importance of territorial cohesion and draws attention to the impact of EU enlargement on economic, social and territorial aspects of cohesion. The TA 2020 (2011) finally brings up the notion of inequality, but only once, and only as a possible effect of environmental degradation. However, it acknowledges that exclusion from the socio-economic circuit has a strong territorial character and stresses the importance of territorial cohesion and its principle of solidarity between the more advanced territories and those lagging behind (EU Ministers, 2011, p. 3, 5).

The TA 2030 (2020) finally seems to start grappling with inequality, utilizing the term a total of 14 times. It asserts the importance of reducing inequalities between better-off places and those that are lagging behind (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 2). The problem of people and places that drift apart amid increasing imbalances and inequalities in Europe is presented as a territorial issue, which the authorities at all levels should work to change by cooperating and balancing 'inclusiveness, sustainability, competitiveness and resilience through participative and innovative integrated territorial development' (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 3). Inequalities are seen here as deepened, if not even caused, by European demographic dynamics: aging, depopulation, domestic and intra-European migration. The suggested solution relies on Europe's territorial diversity and its development potential, and calls for 'cooperation and networking within and between cities, towns and their surrounding areas' through which functional regions should be created, thereby improving conditions for economic and social development everywhere, and reducing inequalities across Europe (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 16).

While other reference documents very seldom mention inequality or inequalities, the emphasis given by the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 on the topic is quite innovative. Goal 10 aims precisely to *Reduce inequalities within and among countries*. This goal alone frames the concern about inequality quite clearly, as it is referred to as a problem to be addressed by countries, or territories with politically defined borders. However, the extended version of the Agenda provides few additional clues as to which inequalities are to be addressed. On the one hand, the words inequality

or inequalities are only mentioned 10 times – while the word poverty appears 29 times; on the other, the conceptual universe associated with inequality is broad and unspecific. In one occasion, the document mentions inequalities of outcome; in another, as a factor that gives rise to violence; the document refers to income and gender inequalities one time each too. In short, the idea of Goal 10 is to reduce inequality to achieve sustainable economic growth and foster social inclusion.

Although the TA 2030 repeatedly makes a reference to how joint action is necessary in order to address European inequalities and how these inequalities have a clear spatial component, it does not address the existing dynamic between the more and the less prosperous European regions, nor how this dynamic reinforces the divisions already in place. An example of a result of such a persisting division is Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme which, although presented as an opportunity for people from less economically advanced parts of Europe, is actually a necessity for the agricultural industry of more advantageous regions, and it often entails exploitation of workers (see Ivancheva, 2007; Rogozanu, 2020, April 16). More cooperation and communication between European regions of different means and levels of economic productivity has been repeatedly prescribed throughout the documents analysed here, over the last four decades. Still, the spatial discrepancies persist, along with other kinds of inequality. Solving this problem might require action that is much more focused, and much more aware of political underpinnings of the existing spatial and social disparities and feedback loops that sustain them.

Keyword 3: Justice (Just Europe)

To analyse how the idea of justice was employed in the TA discourse, we scanned the five versions of the TA (1983-2020) and four supporting documents – the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, the New Leipzig Charter, the Pact of Amsterdam (EU Ministers, 2016) and the European Green Deal. All ideas of cooperation, equality, equity and peace rest upon the foundation of a just society and, ultimately, are intrinsically linked to most concepts explored in this study, like inequality or sustainable. Justice is a central concept to the foundation of the European Union itself, in the aftermath of the Second World War, and was present in the works of philosophers from Plato to Rawls, whose contribution shaped European modern times.

Interestingly, no mention of justice is found in the 1983 Torremolinos Charter, or the 1999 ESDP, or the first two versions of the TA (2007 and 2011). It is only in the TA 2030 that we find the idea of justice in ten occasions, even though they are applied in the adjectivation of transition and of Europe:

The objective of just transition is to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaves no one and no place behind, and delivers a high quality of life for all. (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 11);

The priorities for a Just Europe underline the territorial dimension and spatial planning contributions to overarching policy priorities. These priorities include economic, social and territorial cohesion, the European Pillar of Social Rights, a Europe closer to citizens, a more inclusive, sustainable and integrated development of places, Just Transition and territorial integration in Europe (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 14).

As the idea of justice is pivotal to the other concepts analysed in our study and to the spirit of the documents we reference, we expanded our search wider. We found that while there are no mentions to justice in the Pact of Amsterdam, in the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, *access to justice* is considered a priority in Goal 16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for

sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In one occasion, justice is associated with human rights, rule of law, equality and non-discrimination; in another, the document stresses the need to provide equal access to justice; and in yet another instance, the negative consequence of ‘inequality, corruption, poor governance and illicit financial and arms flows’ is described as injustice (UN, 2015, p. 13).

As for the term just, the Sustainable Development Agenda mentions the determination to foster just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence followed by the argument ‘there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development’ UN, 2015, p. 6) linking the ideas of non-violence, peace and sustainable development. Another mention of just comes in a paragraph where goals are established for 2030: to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities, to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights; to promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls; to ensure protection of planet and natural resources; to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth; and to share prosperity and decent work for all. Finally, the word just is used in association with children’s rights, human rights, gender equality for women and girls and the most vulnerable; as well as in the description of just, peaceful and inclusive societies (UN, 2015, p. 6). We find only one mention of just, green and productive when describing desirable European cities in the New Leipzig Charter (EU Ministers, 2020b, p. 2).

While in the UN’s New Urban Agenda we can read:

We share a vision of cities for all, referring to the equal use and enjoyment of cities and human settlements, seeking to promote inclusivity and ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all’ (UN, 2016, p. 5).

Even though a ‘Just Europe’ is designated as one of the two main overarching goals of the TA 2030, together with a ‘Green Europe’, we find a considerable lack of definition of what is meant by just and justice in the TA documents specifically as well as in the other satellite references. We are left with the impression that the word just was mostly used to lead the way to introduce policy documents such as the Just Transition Mechanism, which accounts for seven of the total ten times the word just is used in the TA 2030 – the other three refer to ‘Just Europe’. The concept of justice itself is not defined nor problematized in these policy documents, which is especially problematic since the word can entail many different understandings and there are different and conflicting theories of justice – saying that ‘no one is left behind’ is, we claim, insufficient.

Keyword 4: Sustainability (Green Europe)

The term sustainability, especially in this context (related with green or environmental matters), is inevitably associated with the aforementioned Brundtland Report (1987) and with its definition of sustainable development as the ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (p. 54). This justifies why even though environmental consciousness has been rising in the last decades, we find no mentions of the words sustainable or sustainability in the 1983 Torremolinos document.

It is only in the 1999 ESDP that we find the first mentions of the words green, sustainable and sustainability. The first appears eight times associated mostly with greenhouse effects but is also used to describe woods and forests as the green lungs of Europe and to describe ‘urban green

spaces' (CEC, 1999, p. 22, 31, 63, 72). Sustainability is mentioned only three times, when referencing itself as an object of reflection or when discussing its associated principles. It is in the use of the word sustainable that we can observe the rise of this imperative concern: mentioned 86 times throughout the document, sustainable is used to refer to jobs, spatial development, policy, landscapes, cities, urban regions, metropolitan regions, urban development, resources, agriculture, forest management, rural development, management and quality of water, use of water resources, development in river areas, land use and water, efficient use of water, management of ecosystems, exploitation methods to resources not used to date or use of natural resources. We also find the word sustainable used to describe economic and spatial structure, economic development, development, tourism, mobility, infrastructure, use of the infrastructure or territorially balanced development of the EU.

In the 2007 version of the TA, we still find the word green tied to greenhouse gas emissions, however, we now see a new mention to the trans-European Green structure (EU Ministers, 2007a, p. 7-8). The word sustainability appears twice, in vague constellations associating 'economic development and environmental, social and cultural sustainability'; and referencing 'global competitiveness and sustainability of all regions of Europe' (EU Ministers, 2007a, p. 3, 8). The adjective sustainable is used more sporadically than in 1999. It can be found 19 times throughout the document but mostly in titles and names of documents or to describe economic growth and job creation or sustainable development by itself (EU Ministers, 2007a, p. 1-6).

In the 2011 TA, the same topics are found regarding the use of the description green, including greenhouse gas but two new mentions arise, namely regarding green economy and green infrastructure networks (EU Ministers, 2011, p. 5, 8). The word sustainability is found twice in 'optimal balance of sustainability, competitiveness and social cohesion' and in 'prosperity, sustainability and stability of cities and regions' (EU Ministers, 2011, p. 3-4); and sustainable is also used in a somewhat all-encompassing manner with 23 mentions. The adjective is used in titles, to describe growth, territorial development, inclusive and efficient use of Europe's territory and resources, harmonious territorial development, resource efficient economic structures, energy solutions, utilisation of territorial capital and enlargement of markets (EU Ministers, 2011, p. 4-10).

In the TA 2030, the word green is found 15 times when mentioning the European Green Deal or the Green and Just Transition, but it is also used as an adjective in several occasions, associated with the words economy, infrastructure or public. The word sustainability is only found twice but the word sustainable is now used in 44 occasions. Among these mentions, the word is now used to refer to local economies, use of natural resources and economic development, investments, soil and land use, connections, digital and physical connectivity of places, digital society, forms of transport and connectivity, developments, urban mobility plans, transport including replacing short distance flights, mobility and fully integrated European transport network, functional links between neighbouring areas, future for all places and people, territorial development strategies, territorial cohesion, policy frameworks, Europe, energy, secure and affordable energy supplies, resilient solutions and use of resources (EU Ministers, 2020a).

In the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, the word green is mentioned only four times: one to describe green and public spaces; one to mention the Green Climate Fund; and another two times to mention global greenhouse and gas emissions. As for the word sustainability, a total of six mentions can be found: once to encourage especially large and transnational companies to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycles; two following mentions focus on associating sustainability with financial debt management and with international and domestic business and finance, specifically debt sustainability in relation

with systemic issues, science, technology, innovation, capacity building and data monitoring (Addis Ababa Action Agenda). In another instance, the document mentions the need to ‘assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies’; and finally, in paragraph 69 we can read that ‘maintaining sustainable debt levels is the responsibility of borrowing countries’ while also recognizing that ‘lenders also have a responsibility to lend in a way that does not undermine a country’s debt sustainability’ (UN, 2015, p. 34). The agenda supports the maintenance of debt sustainability of countries that have received debt relief and achieved sustainable debt levels.

Interestingly, the word sustainable appears over 120 times throughout the text, leading a reader to think that the term is used as an all-encompassing adjective applied to most topics addressed. Indeed, nearly half of these mentions relate to sustainable development (total of 55). Under this umbrella-term, a wide range of topics are covered, e.g. poverty eradication, peace, security and conflict resolution, use of domestic resources, business innovation and creativity to solve sustainable development challenges, inclusive regional processes, democracy, good governance and the rule of law, climate change, human and gender rights, treatment and prevention of non-communicable diseases and disorders, natural and cultural diversity, nature preservation, ocean, seas and marine resources, education, knowledge and skills and tourism or gross domestic product (UN, 2015).

As we can see, outside of the scope of sustainable development the word sustainable continues to characterize a lot of different topics, including debt levels, strategies, policies, agriculture and fisheries, water and sanitation management, modern energy, economic growth, industrialization, cities and human settlements, consumption and production patterns, use of terrestrial ecosystems, forest management, resilient paths, safe human habitats, innovative and people-centred economies, transport systems, tourism, urban development/urbanisation, food production systems, lifestyles and livelihood opportunities, infrastructure development or public/private procurement practices.

While the word sustainability seems to have maintained its status, our analysis shows that the term sustainable became almost a synonym of reasonable or balanced in recent policy documents. In other related documents, such as the European Green Deal (EC, 2019), the term sustainable seems to have deviated from its 1987 meaning, of aiming to ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’, being used a total of 68 times to cover topics ranging from low-emission technologies, to upfront investment for inclusive growth and public investment and direct private capital. This lack of definition might not be exclusive to the TA, but we fear this ubiquitous use of the term sustainable to describe any process or goal, regardless of its suitability, could be damaging to the purpose of having common conceptual references.

Keyword 5: Territory

Research studies on the thematic of territory have ‘not always been grounded upon a clear sense of what precisely ‘territory’ means, despite its centrality to all major social-scientific definitions of the modern state’ (Brenner & Elden, 2009, p. 355-356). Indeed, in our analysis, we tried to distinguish the words territory from territorial precisely to distinguish its use as a noun from its use as an adjective. We scanned the five versions of the TA (1983-2020) and searched in the 2007 Spatial Development Glossary for an additional input. Indeed, we found an increasing trend to describe

territorial matters without clear stands on how territory is understood; which we consider particularly problematic for a TA.

From the 1983 Torremolinos Charter to the TA 2030 there was a significant increase in the use of the concept of territory, reaching almost a trivialisation of its use. If territory and related words, as territories or territorial, were only mentioned twice in the Torremolinos Charter (1983), in the ESDP (1999) they start to become more relevant, with 82 mentions in a document of more than 80 pages, but it is with the TA they almost reach the referred trivialisation: There are 67 mentions in the TA of the EU (2007), 169 in the TA 2020 (2011) and 103 in the TA 2030 (2020) – all documents with less than 30 pages and excluding from the counting the title. Just to illustrate the context in which they are now being used, in the TA 2030, there are 24 mentions of territorial cohesion, 18 of territorial development, 10 of territorial dimension and there also several single references as in territorial balance, territorial diversity or territorial inequalities.

This brief quantitative analysis shows us more clearly that there has been a change in terminology to express similar concepts, which Faludi refers to (2007, p. 3) when comparing the ESDP with the TA of the EU (2007). In the Torremolinos Charter (1983) there is a frequent use of the concept of space that later starts to be distinguished in the ESDP (1999), with the use of both space and territory. It is in the first version of the TA of the EU (2007) in which space is entirely replaced with territory, with no reference to the space concept at all and 67 mentions to territory. If on the one hand this change can be explained by the fact that the Torremolinos Charter was adopted by the Council of Europe and the other documents by the European Commission (which adopted territorial cohesion as its third pillar in the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon), on the other hand, it can also be interpreted as an attempt to enforce the TA by trying to make the EU countries more committed to it through the administrative connotation that the territory concept has and the space concept lacks.

The best reference to a definition of territory as a concept can be found in a background document of the TA (EC, 2005, p. 6), as follows:

there is a widespread consensus about possible elements of 'territorial', including: places and geographical context matter; policies should be differentiated according to the territorial context; thematic integration of different sectoral policies with impact on certain places (whatever the level) would be desirable – but is obviously difficult to achieve; and that the involvement of actors from subnational levels (regional, municipalities) is crucial for the success of strategies and for translation into the 'regional language of people'.

Regarding the concept of space, it is worth mentioning that the Torremolinos Charter (1983, p. 3) starts with the definition of regional/spatial planning as giving:

geographical expression to the economic, social, cultural and ecological policies of society (and as being) an administrative technique and a policy developed as an interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach directed towards balanced regional development and the physical organisation of space according to an overall strategy.

The Spatial Development Glossary (COE, 2007) also helps to grasp how territory is conceptualized throughout the TA. Mostly, the word territory appears as a synonym of space and/or place as political connotations are often absent. Territory serves mostly to describe the area which is influenced by spatial development, impacted by public policies or which contains particular resources. It is never specified if we are discussing European, national, regional or local territories, however, a territory can have a particular cultural identity and history (such as a language); a rural territory, for instance, is said to possibly include one or more small towns (COE, 2007, p. 24). The concept of territorial cohesion is described as an overarching objective of the ESDP, for instance, but the authors

of the Glossary also admit that at the time of writing, territorial cohesion had not been the object of an official definition (p. 28). Considered complementary to the objectives of economic and social cohesion, it targets the entire territory (the EU?) through at least three multi-dimensional components: territorial quality; territorial efficiency and territorial identity (p. 28). In these components, territory is what determines the quality of living and working environments; it should foster competitive economic fabrics, as well as be capable of resisting de-structuring forces related to the globalisation process and promote cooperation between regions; and finally, a territory should have social capital, be able to develop shared visions of the future and value local knowledge.

The Glossary also presents a historical dimension of how territory is conceptualized in EU documents. When referring to territorial development the authors claim that its qualitative dimension (COE, 2007, p. 29):

strongly reflects the present context of Europe, characterised by low growth rates and strong regional imbalances. While in the period of strong growth of the post-war decades the main tasks of public policies regarding the territory were to guide the growth process through land-use regulation, provision of infrastructure and attribution of incentives to attract investments (the related policy concepts were “territorial planning”, “aménagement du territoire”, “Raumordnung”, “Ordenación del territorio”, etc.), developing the territory has become a generalised priority in order to provide employment and to reduce the territorial imbalances.

In our investigation we found evidence of an increasing use of the word territorial (2 in 1983; 20 in 1999; 67 in 2007; 169 in 2011; and 81 in 2020) while the word territory was only mentioned considerably in the 1999 ESDP (52 times) and is virtually irrelevant in all other versions of the agenda. We found that a long-standing definition of territory has not been problematized in any of the different versions of this agenda to date. Similarly to other key concepts analysed in this research, like sustainable or environmental, the term territorial is used to characterise processes and phenomena regarding virtually all dimensions of European society, only differing in how they relate to spaces or places.

Keyword 6: Transition

While the word transition in the territorial agendas has seen an increase in its use, the meaning seems to be consistent in the sense that it refers to a transitional state where dynamics change and policy planning and regulation plays an important role. This study scanned through the five versions of the TA and the European Green Deal 2020 to describe its conceptual universe.

In ESDP, transition (used in the adjective form – transitional) refers to the changes of the political and administrative system in the EU enlargement area (which made up of Central European and Baltic countries at the time) and the fact that this transitional situation affects the handling of spatial issues (CEC, 1999, p. 50).

While TA of the EU (2007) does not use the term transition, in the TA 2020 (2011), transition is again mentioned only once, and for the first time in the context of shifting the economic structures towards a more sustainable model. TA 2020 acknowledges the dire consequences of the 2008 global economic crisis, anticipating the varying paths and durations of recovery across European cities and regions. The crisis, according to TA 2020, can be an opportunity to create a more sustainable and resource efficient economy, ‘if appropriate actions are taken’ (EU Ministers, 2011, p. 4).

The TA 2030 uses the term transition a total of 30 times, but often in a way that is not nearly as precisely defined. The context varies: beside referencing the Just Transition Mechanism, TA 2030

mentions multiple different transitions (energy, economic, societal) and refers to a goal of achieving an inclusive and sustainable Europe that ‘protects common livelihoods and shapes transitions’ (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 5). It is interesting to examine this idea of Europe as an entity that ‘shapes transitions’, especially with a hindsight of long transitions to neoliberal economic model in the post-socialist societies of Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Europe, in the countries that are either part of the EU, or aspire to be. In these transitions processes, political and financial institutions of the EU often advocated for certain economic and social solutions as the only viable scenarios, even when they resulted in creating and cementing long-term social and spatial inequalities (see Golubchikov, 2016). The creation of Just Transition Mechanism might be an acknowledgement of lessons learned from these processes, but even if it is so, it goes unmentioned. Another question worth asking is: is the Europe envisioned here, the inclusive and sustainable entity that should ‘shape transitions’, a synonym for the EU? If not, how is it different? If yes, how would its current mechanisms and democratic capacities evolve to achieve this?

During the 2010s, the conversation around sustainable transition grew and resulted in the concept being developed across several important documents pertinent to the territorial issues in the EU; more specifically, to the issues of urban development. Urban Agenda/Pact of Amsterdam (2016) counts energy transition and digital transition amongst its priority themes within the Working Programme of the Urban Agenda for the EU, which spells out concrete actions envisioned to achieve these transitions, such as increasing the local production of renewable energy and making digital public services available to disabled and elderly citizens. In New Urban Agenda (EU Ministers, 2016), the term transition is used to refer to the process of bringing informal economic activity into the formal sphere, and to emphasize the commitment to the pursuit of higher productivity in urban economies and to propelling the circular economy. Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015) also brings up the word transition, although only once, and in association with the need for this agenda to be implemented to ensure the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals in planning and national development strategies. As for what the transition should lead to, TA 2030 offers the goals such as sustainable digital society, more sustainable development, climate-neutral economy, circular economy, place-based circular economy, and place-based circular and carbon/climate-neutral economic model. This picture gets somewhat clearer with the adoption of the European Green Deal (EC, 2019).

In the European Green Deal, transition seems to be used to describe the process associated with a shift to a more just and inclusive (EU Ministers, 2020a, p. 3) society that aims to be conscious of climate change and environmental sustainability. To achieve this ambitious goal, the Green Deal focuses on presenting funding solutions that provide predictability for investors and private actors, as ‘public funds will not suffice, the EU and its Member States will coordinate their support to engage with partners to bridge the funding gap by mobilising private finance’ (EC, 2019, p. 22). Furthermore, the clean energy transition should benefit consumers to ‘help achieve decarbonisation at the lowest possible cost’ (EC, 2019, p. 6), and the transition to climate neutrality should also rely on smart infrastructure, for which, according to the European Green Deal, a revision of the Trans-European Networks – Energy (TEN-E) Regulation will be necessary.

A Europe in transition should also be based on a sustainable model of inclusive growth, which means a job-intensive economic activity; a circular economy action plan particularly for resource-intensive sectors such as textiles, construction, electronics and plastics but also to encourage businesses to allow consumers to choose repairable products (‘right to repair’, EC, 2019, p. 7-8). Clean technologies, digital, space and defence applications are also critical to this transition as proposed by the European Green Deal, as are sustainable food production systems (‘Farm to Fork

Strategy', EC, 2019, p. 12). Managing this transition will also lead to significant structural changes in business models, skill requirements and knowledge production, which is why schools, training institutions and universities will be called in to engage pupils, parents and the wider community on the 'changes needed for a successful transition' (EC, 2019, p. 19).

A European competence framework to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes will be developed, knowing that proactive re-skilling and upskilling will be necessary to help Europe's workforce to acquire 'skills they need to transfer from declining sectors to growing sectors and to adapt to new processes' (EC, 2019, p. 19). The transition will not affect all geographic contexts equally, as not all member states, regions and cities start from the same point or have the same capacity to respond, the document claims. This means that different territories will be affected differently and will have to address different challenges in the process, requiring territorial transition plans for urban and rural areas and protection to the most vulnerable citizens and workers through increased access to re-skilling programmes, jobs in new economic sectors, or energy-efficient housing. Consequently, this shift will forcibly reshape geopolitics, which will bring transformations in Common Security and Defence policies. Additionally, tax reforms, carbon pricing policies (targeting public transport, for instance, or addressing energy poverty) and national budgets should also contribute to a fairer society and a just transition. The Green Deal will prioritise 'removing subsidies for fossil fuels, shifting the tax burden from labour to pollution' (EC, 2019, p. 17) to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, and funding for the digital transformation to boost the EU's ability to predict and manage environmental disasters. EU regulation on chemicals, materials and other products on the European market will be stricter but will be also standardised to facilitate international trade. To do this, the 'Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument proposes to allocate a target of 25% of its budget to climate-related objectives' (EC, 2019, p. 22). The document concludes by saying that the 'involvement and commitment of the public and of all stakeholders is crucial (...) citizens are and should remain the driving force of the transition' and stressing the European Green Deal's commitment to transition to a fair and prosperous society that 'responds to the challenges posed by climate change and environmental degradation, improving the quality of life of current and future generations' (EC, 2019, p. 22-23).

The fact that the Green Deal has created a policy such as Just Transition Mechanism, which conditions financing of the transition process upon territorial planning, might bring about a change in the process of mending spatial disparities across Europe. Rather than call for more solidarity and cooperation in the process of territorial cohesion, this policy promises to redistribute the help to the areas that are most in need of support. It also opens multiple questions, especially in relation to the creation of territorial just transition plans (EC, 2020, p. 3) by the member states – therefore, to the entire system of local and regional planning, its openness and inclusivity. We might now have a policy called Just Transition Mechanism, but we are still unsure of how a just transition will or should look like, neither are we certain of how it is negotiated at different levels of political decision making in the EU.

Final considerations

Our aim with this study was to let the content in the TA (from 1983 to 2020) lead the way in analysing how the conceptual framework of European territorial issues contributes to a common language, which is critical for the cohesion and cooperation such a multicultural geopolitical space needs not only to face climate change adversities but also to build a better future.

While we can read along these documents how the European society at-large and citizen-led groups are pivotal to achieve this transition to a greener and more sustainable Europe, our findings lead us to conclude that the TA 2030's conceptual framework is still insufficiently clear to achieve its goal of orienting action in the European territory. In addition to using broadly defined terms that are used to reference multidimensional topics, we find that specific policy options, which could clarify how this conceptual framework could serve the European community, are also missing.

In summary, we found that, regarding the key concept environment is used across the five versions of the TA in one of four ways: as one of three pillars of sustainable development; as the totality of natural resources – biophysical realm; as a sectoral policy; or as a particular context. The TA 2030 associates this concept mostly with challenges, risks, pressures and degradation/fragmentation – conveying concern over the current state of the natural environment. The overall increased use of this concept in recent versions seems to indicate recognition of its importance, however we identify a lack of problematisation and also a tendency to approach it as a risk/problem rather than a potentiality/quality of the conditions that make human life possible.

The second key concept, inequality, was found to be explicit across the TA 2030 in conveying that European inequalities have a clear spatial component; however, the existing dynamic between the more and the less developed European regions, which often reinforces these inequalities, is not considered in this document. The recommendations to overcome the inequality problem through cooperation fail to take into account that the willingness to cooperate and the circumstances, as well as the conditions of cooperation, are explicitly political issues. Devoid of its political context, the cooperation between territories which are at different stages of development may be exploitative, or it may reinforce the existing spatial and social divisions. Failing to explicitly recognise this is a major shortcoming of the TA 2030.

The third key concept, justice, is unequivocally understood in the TA 2030 as a founding concept within the idea of the EU; however, there is no mention of the word found in the first four versions of the TA. It is only in the TA 2030 that justice appears on ten occasions, yet almost always qualifying transition, which leaves us with the impression that it is mainly used to introduce current policy documents such as the Just Transition Mechanism. Considering that a Just Europe is one of two overarching goals of the TA 2030, together with a Green Europe, we find it insufficient that no definition is provided for the concept. The word justice entails many different meanings and is not self-explanatory as there are different theories of justice that might even be conflicting with each other. We find it problematic that the concept of justice is not defined nor problematized in the TA.

The fourth key concept, sustainability, as used in the several versions of the TA, is inevitably associated with the Brundtland Report (1987) and the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development where it gained prominence; therefore, it is related with meeting the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Despite the increased use of versions of this concept in the last three TA documents – suggesting a recognition of its importance to territorial policies - this can also be interpreted as a loss of its foundational meaning.

The fifth key concept, territory, has an interesting diachronic read. Throughout the different versions of the TA since 1983, there has been a rising trend to abandon well-defined concepts regarding *space* in favour of concepts linked to territorial matters. Since the 1983 document, the use of words like territorial and territory has increased significantly, replacing the more clearly defined concept of space and leading almost to a trivialisation of their meaning. We assume that the following two reasons are behind that change: Firstly, territorial cohesion is the third pillar in the Treaty of Lisbon (2009). Secondly, there might be an attempt to enforce a stronger commit-

ment to the TA by key actors by fostering the administrative connotation of territory, which the concept of space lacks.

Finally, the sixth key concept, transition, is strongly linked to the Just Transition Mechanism, which is presented as a new instrument that should explicitly connect territorial planning with the process of transition to the more sustainable models of energy production while providing a way to share the burden of this transition amongst regions with different degrees of development. While this might be a much-needed step in the right direction when it comes to addressing territorial disparities, the TA 2030 document stays vague on the issue of political processes through which the decisions regarding multiple European transitions it mentions – energy, economic, societal – will be made over the next decade. The important question of how the EU, as a political community, might change in the face of its many upcoming transitions, remains unopened.

As a concluding remark, we acknowledge that the TA 2030 is a strategic policy document that strives to represent the ideas and garner commitment from all EU member states, certain neighbouring states and European institutions. Working at the ministerial, directorate general and the ministers' levels is challenging and all political contexts play a part in the final result. We appreciate that this final version has a series of intergovernmental and public consultations and, as such, is a collective product of the democratic process. However, we argue that the TA 2030 could benefit from better recognition of its past legacy. Not doing so, we fear, risks making agendas as such of very little actual use when local action is necessary, and no consultancy resources are available. We hope that our efforts have contributed to shed some light on the complex, conflicting understandings of seemingly consensual concepts and frameworks employed by this document. Our purpose is to serve students, grassroot movements and to assist interested citizens in making better sense of why apparently obvious ideas might entail critical debates and why a common language is so very necessary at local, national and transnational territorial agendas.

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