

TERRITORIAL COHESION – MAJOR DESIDERATUM OF SPATIAL PLANNING

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Territorial Cohesion – major desideratum of spatial planning. The concept of *territorial cohesion* entered recently into the scientific vocabulary, being taken over by the specialists in spatial planning, as well as the actors and stakeholders in politics and administration. It defines a fundamental feature, of structural and functional nature, belonging to the territory that aims to eliminate its dysfunctions and to make its inter-relations and productivity optimal. The inner structure of the phenomenon includes both physical features belonging to the earth, as a geographic layer and to the anthropic component, the demographic one, along with inter-relations of economic, social, political and administrative nature.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of *territorial cohesion* is a young one, as it has enriched the list of the concepts that are intensely used only in the last decade. Its ascension in the specialized vocabulary, used by urbanists and geographers, and mostly by those working in politics and administration was fulminating, succeeding to impose itself as a fundamental concept in the triad of strategies of development, along with *economic cohesion* and *social cohesion*.

A short summary of the history of the concept, from its launching, in the last decade of the 20th century, until today, sends the analyst to a list of searches and attempts that marked its definition and its affirmation in the milieu of specialists working in spatial planning and the decision-makers at the level of European Union institutions in the field and, finally, in the public conscience. The premise of establishing a new domain with special aims, which would be later linked to territorial cohesion, was born once all factors of decision focused on the resources of spatial development and the ways this can be achieved within the European Union.

A first document focused on the spatial issue is the *European Spatial Planning Charter*, adopted at the 6th Session of the CEMAT in Torremolinos (1983), where *spatial planning* was defined, as aiming towards a balanced social and economic development of the regions, aspect that represents the seed of one of the major attributes territorial cohesion has.

European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), Potsdam (1999), marks an important step in this sense. Without explicitly relating to the territorial cohesion concept, the document refers to a balanced, *cohesive* development of the territory, through polycentrism and de-centralisation, issues that we find in the inner structure of the phenomenon analyzed, it being incompatible with economic, social, infrastructure-related or environmental disparities. Yet, the document makes direct reference to economic and social cohesion, to a territorial competitiveness through the affirmation of a balanced urban system, the access to infrastructure and knowledge, sustainable development and a wise management of resources, protection of the natural and cultural heritage. The document proposes an *integrative spatial development*, emphasizing the obstructive role of the borders, which become the most inhibitive factor of territorial cohesion at the EU level, and not only, when analyzed more in depth.

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The *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent*, CEMAT, Hannover (2000) reiterates the need “to promote *territorial cohesion* through a balanced social and economic development and an improved competitiveness”. The document supports an interconnection of economic and social issues with ecologic and cultural ones, and of spatial planning with the policies on sectors.

Ljubljana Declaration on the Territorial Dimension of Sustainable Development, adopted at the 13th Session of CEMAT, in September 2003, focuses on the economic, social and *territorial cohesion* dimensions, to which a fourth dimension is added, namely that of cultural sustainability. The document emphasizes the major role that towns have in spatial planning, as urban development policies need to address the reduction of disparities within the urban systems, through a more balanced territorial distribution of activities, infrastructure and services, namely precisely what cohesion confers to the systemic unit.

A first confirmation of territorial cohesion as a fundamental strategic and operational concept is conferred through its establishment as the *third dimension* of the Constitutional Treaty, along with economic cohesion and social cohesion. This happened during the EU Inter-Governmental Conference of the Member States in Brussels, on October 29, 2004. Since then, territorial cohesion imposed as an objective of the EU, unanimously accepted by the political factor, a major objective included in the Cohesion Report, 2005 and the Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion, adopted starting with 2006.

Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategy, 2004 focuses mainly on the phenomena from the economic field, in order to ensure a convergence of the strategies from the EU countries, the aim being to eliminate the disparities and to fortify territorial cohesion through agreed actions and structural mutations in five main domains, included in five areas of priority, for which the following directions of action are indicated: business milieu, knowledge society, labour market, internal market and the environment.

The *Declaration from Lisbon on the Networks for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent: Bridges over Europe* adopted at the 14th Session of CEMAT (October 2006) states the important role pan-European networks have for the strengthening of territorial cohesion through the stimulation of competitiveness and innovation.

Planners Network for Central and South-East Europe (*PlaNet CenSE*) in a document named *Processes and Perspectives for Spatial Development in Central and South-East Europe (2000–2006)* analyzes the realities of the area judging on the three main objectives of spatial development: competitiveness, integration and *cohesion*. Territorial cohesion is understood as the reduction of the disparities among and within the European regions through spatial planning policies and other public policies with a major territorial impact. The policies are to be promoted by local and regional authorities in order to achieve a spatial, polycentric and balanced development.

Territorial Agenda of the European Union “*Towards a More Competitive and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions*” agreed in Leipzig, on May 25, 2007 discusses specific aspects of spatial cohesion; its place in the matrix of development is admitted and the ways in which it can be achieved are emphasized.

This document adds the aim of *territorial cohesion* as a third dimension of the territory, along with *economic cohesion* and the *social* one. The need to introduce the concept in the main treaty of the EU is emphasized. Another emphasis is on the need to reach a common understanding on this issue by all Member States. The main message of the document refers to the need to integrate *regional identities* into the concept of territorial cohesion, thus to integrate the needs and the characteristics of the regions and the towns, especially the geographic challenges and the opportunities. The Agenda considers that territorial cohesion can be achieved through:

- the development of a polycentric urban system;
- new forms of partnership and territorial governance between urban and rural areas;
- the promotion of trans-national clusters of competition and innovation;
- strengthening ecological structures and the preservation of cultural resources;
- strengthening trans-European networks, the promotion of trans-European risk management.

Finally, the corollary of the searches and attempts of definition for territorial cohesion is in a programmatic document, exclusively focusing on territorial cohesion, being a true manifesto, issued in Brussels by the Commission, on October 6, 2008, namely the *Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. Turning Diversity into Strength*. In this document, territorial cohesion is seen as “means of transforming diversity into an asset...to ensure that common assets are used in a coordinated and sustainable way ensure a harmonious development of the territories, independent of their diversity” (p. 3).

In order to accomplish territorial cohesion, activities are to be made optimal within the “no man’s land” areas, peripheral areas, within trans-border regions, but also within many Member States. At the same time, the disparities in critical regions and the disadvantaged areas must be eliminated. Issues related to difficult social integration (the case of the Roma people is notorious), access to education, health care, culture and energy must also be addressed. The document sees territorial cohesion as associating economic growth with an improvement of social conditions and ecological balance. Therefore, territorial cohesion ensures a fertile land for sustainable development due to its role of activator of a good management. By implementing “the three Cs” rule (concentration-connectivity-cooperation), the aim is to eliminate three major inconveniences that stand in the way of territorial cohesion, namely differences in density, distance and division. The document emphasizes the importance of the drawing up of a cohesion policy, of the most appropriate definition for the concept, as well as the need to choose the qualitative and quantitative indexes for its evaluation.

In order to implement territorial cohesion, *cooperation programs* have been set up, such as INTERREG (established in 1989), REGIO, and an observation network – ESPON, 2006.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

“Territorial cohesion is a concept in evolution, adapted to a great diversity of realities and needs, without being a separate policy, it is rather an objective that is still looking for its definition and usage, a concept that can ensure the link between 'economic competitiveness' and 'cohesion', a process that would bring a harmony among the policies from various sectors, a means of capitalizing territorial potential”. This definition is stated in the introduction to *Territorial Cohesion and Competitiveness in the Context of Europe 2020 Strategy* Conference held in Bucharest, on December 15, 2011. At the event, there is also another important statement: “even though there is no universally accepted definition of the concept, there are though some elements on which there is a general consensus: a balanced development of the territory, capitalization of the potential of the territory, the importance of the geographical features in drawing up the policies, a focus of the public action on 'the three Cs' rule: concentration, connectivity and cooperation”.

Therefore, territorial cohesion is still under clarification, as being a spatial phenomenon of great complexity, grouping numerous aspects of natural, economic, social and political-administrative nature. Therefore, it needs a semantic decantation, its significances, its content need to be rigorously defined, along with a wise delineation of its area and its manner of interaction with other phenomena and processes, characteristic for the territorial system. The aim of this paper is to bring its contribution to make light in the situation described above, to decipher the intimate structure of the phenomenon, by emphasizing its activating factors and its repressing ones, including those circumstances at edge, as it is the case of the cross-border regions.

In order to fulfil the aim of the paper, the documents issued by European and Romanian institutions and organisations in the field, as well as the opinions expressed by persons well-known for their work towards the acceptance of the concept in science have been analyzed with a critic’s eye. The main method used in the paper consisted of a profound introspection within the richness of significance attributed to the concept and a process of argumentation of the facts, by connecting directly with the objective reality.

3. RESULTS

3.1. A first result of our introspection is **the formulation of a geographical definition** for territorial cohesion. It must sum up, in a synthetic way, all its basic attributes, it must eliminate ambiguities and redundant effects that are generated by synonymous concepts and variations on the same theme, and it must permit a phenomenological structuring on a logical, coherent frame, based on an idea.

From this point of view, we realize that there are a lot of concepts that are presently assimilated to spatial cohesion. Among the most used ones there are: cooperation, connectivity, grouping, competitiveness, economic development, coherence, communication, territorial dimension of human rights and of democracy, and spatial planning policy etc. If we attempt to decipher the significance of these concepts, of their semantic meaning and their suitability in our context, we realize that *they define, in the majority of cases, the means, the ways to attain the aim of cohesion, yet they do not define the phenomenon itself*. For this reason, the range of definitions widened, each one emphasizing a certain aspect of the phenomenon, a certain way to follow in order to achieve it.

All debates so far concerning the terminology related to territorial cohesion are grouped around “the three Cs”: cooperation-connectivity-concentration. They represent fundamental pillars of the phenomenon as they have a decisive, inter-connected contribution to the materialization of the final aim, namely the identification of territorial cohesion in reality (Ahner 2011). Depending on the authors and the aim they had, interpretations vary continuously, other concepts, among the above-mentioned ones, come to impose their own meanings. Besides creating new and new debates, specificities of particular context become more important, which is not significant for creating a big picture. Therefore, we are presently attending an explosion of formulations, introspections similar to the Brownian movement in which decantation is required.

Approaching the phenomenon at the level of territorial systems, no matter their level (regional, areal, local), the most suitable definition would have to encompass the place and the role territorial cohesion has in the spatial organism. The key operation of any attempt in this field is the establishment of the relevance of territorial cohesion at systemic level, which is the main task of the researcher and/or the specialist that will use its advantages. Consequently, *cohesion is a fundamental feature of structural and functional nature of the territorial system, aimed to eliminate its dysfunctions and make its inter-relations and productivity optimal*.

3.2. Elements that make up the structure of territorial cohesion

Territorial cohesion is a complex phenomenon, involving all the components of the spatial system in a direct or an indirect way. Figure 1 shows the elements of territorial cohesion. They are *sine qua non* conditions of its materialization and individualization among other fundamental features of the territorial organism. It can be seen that they make up a diverse spectrum of factors that form the structure of the territory, starting with the physical and geographical specificities. These are involved in offering the accessibility and suitability for certain forms of exploitation. The list continues with natural resources, the quality of the environment and human resources. Concerning the last one, an original aspect must be mentioned, namely the degree of attachment man has for a place, territory, expressed through a well-defined mental space. Obviously, other elements that make up territorial cohesion are also related to those of social nature, infrastructure (technical endowment of the territory), economy and a good management.

Concerning the *physical structure of the territory*, the diversity of the geographical factors (orography, hydrography, climate, biogeography) determines a varied range of spatial differences that have to be overcome in order to ensure cohesive inter-relations. A well-known example for Romania is in the Maramureş county, where Oaş-Gutâi-Țibleş mountainous barrier generates a major functional split of the territorial system. It has to be taken into consideration beforehand and it has to be eliminated through measures aimed to develop the infrastructure that ensures the access (road and

railway tunnels). This will ensure a generalized and polyvalent interaction among the Land of Maramureș, in the North, the Land of Lăpuș or the Land of Chioar, both located in the South of the orographic barrier.

Natural resources represent a factor that has a contrasting cohesive action: on one hand, their abundance can stimulate a constant, sustainable economic and social development and on the other, they can generate important local or areal disparities, if their geographical location is unevenly distributed within the spatial system. The example of the mono-industrial towns (Motru, Rovinari, Nucet, Vașcău, Ștei, Baia Sprie, Cavnic, Moldova Nouă etc.), that developed in Romania during the communist period and also have been maintained, on certain coordinates, until today, is due exactly to a preferential capitalization of a sole type of resource, which is dominating in the area. Its depletion determined afterwards major economic and social disparities. An integrative management of the resources at the level of the whole territory becomes an opportunity for development, and implicitly, of the spatial cohesion of the territory.

The *quality of the environment* represents a *sine qua non* condition of territorial cohesion as a whole, as a degraded, unbalanced environment is not compatible with the most elementary requests of the concept of territorial cohesion. The powerful industrial pollution within Copșa Mică area was against the aggregation of the spatial system in the area due to the major dysfunctions concerning landscape and society (the inhabitants' health was seriously affected); all this despite the economic advantages generated by the plant that produced sulphuric acid and soot. This situation is valid for any urban or rural area where the situation of the environment is in a precarious state, no matter the type of the anthropogenic intervention.

Human resources, which came in the equation from demography, represent the driving force of the cohesion of any space, as they are the producer and the beneficiary of cohesion. A numerous, young, trained population represents an important advantage in the process of development, mobilizing its levers at lower costs. At the other end, there is the aged population, with a negative development, with evident professional discrepancies, generating serious issues on labour market and making that territory an unattractive one. This aspect must be retained as Romania and other countries from the European Union are presently faced with a decrease in population and have a high ageing index. All the more, this indicator of spatial cohesion needs a longer period of time and involves varied strategies: increase of birth rate, developing the educational system, improving social conditions etc.

human resources are grouped here. Yet this is a place of major and acute economic and social disparities. An essential factor for territorial cohesion is the *geographic mental space*, generated by a close, multi-secular cohabitation between man and place. European documents do not perceive this concept at its true value (Cocean 2001, 2005, 2011; Cocean, Ciangă 2000).

Concerning the mechanisms that built territorial identity, we discuss the factors that contributed to its creation and strengthening. The specific and authentic nature of some rural areas is the result of a distinct collective conscience that activated in each such territorial unit, delineated on mental criteria (the reality of the place has been transformed in spiritual values). From this to the inhabitant's personal or the community identification with the territory that he/it inhabits was just a step away, which was made by the majority of the persons involved.

The establishment of a mental space for a rural area (it is in fact valid for the towns, too) is done through a cooperation of the geographical, economic, political, social and cultural factors that activated in connection during a long period of time. The close connection man-place, through the mental space (created along the history), man's or the community's identification with the territory he/it inhabits generates extremely positive attitudes, a very close attachment concerning the involvement of the anthropic factor in the development of that territory, including the promotion policies and those related to the preservation of the regional specificity. In this context, spatial entities called "land" (*pays*, "țară" in Romanian) become the most relevant models of territorial cohesion (Renard 1995) in the European Union.

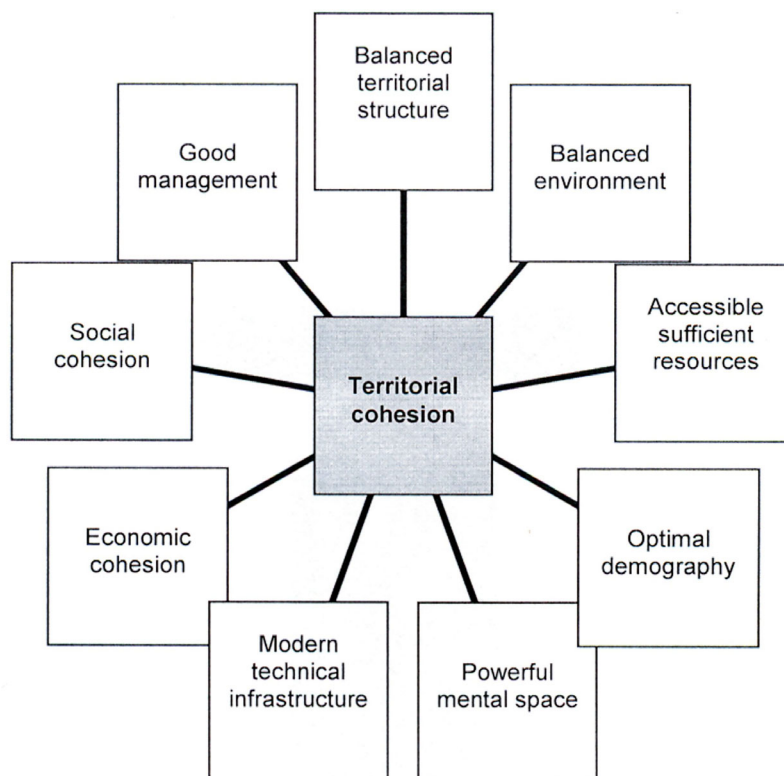


Fig. 1 – Elements that make up the structure of territorial cohesion.

The European rural is another area of manifestation of territorial cohesion. Important natural and *Social cohesion* precedes the territorial one, as the harmonization of the relations within society is synonymous with a favourable background for all the other activities. Social cohesion has various connotations, some having a rather obstructive tone. Thus, the inter-ethnic relations are of utmost importance in those territories inhabited by ethnically and religiously diverse populations. The most at-edge example would be Cyprus. Here, the tensions between Greeks and Turks determined a split of the island, from a political and administrative point of view, which has visible consequences on its unitary, cohesive development. In a similar way, social disparities among social classes, different access to goods and public services, cultural differences etc. become disruptive factors for social cohesion and, inherently, for territorial cohesion.

Technical infrastructure of the territory is a key-element to spatial development, making the links among the elements of the territory and bringing in a harmony into the relations among the elements. Its absence generates, in a high degree, the so-called “negative cohesion” pointed out by Sandu Alexandru in his speech at the Conference in Bucharest, on December 15, 2011. A similar effect is to be seen at an unevenly distribution of the elements in the territory, with concentration in certain areas and evident dissipation in others. A pertinent example would be Hârtibaciu Valley that, even though it is located in the centre of Romania, thus having the envied position of “central place” (Cocean 2010), it has a low degree of development due to a grouping of the major infrastructure means at its periphery, along the morphological corridors of Târnava Mare river and on the line that unites Sibiu, Făgăraș and Brașov depressions.

The presence of a *sustainable and resilient economy*, an economic cohesion anticipates and conditions the affirmation of territorial cohesion. It becomes the foundation of the territorial system and a premise for the social and cultural cohesion. Economic differences and disparities among various

territorial entities or, all the more serious, within the same entity, generate major dysfunctions and alienate the spatial organism from the aim of reaching cohesion. The degree of economic development which had many gradations in the territory, with direct effects on other systemic elements, is at the origin of the so-called *progressive cohesion*. It is reached step by step, in hierarchic levels of inter-relation, from random relations to relations that are structured and inter-conditioned.

A good management of the territory ensures not only competitiveness to the territory (Ardinat 2011), but also the premise of a better-shaped spatial cohesion. A rigorous implementation of suitable policies of development, an efficient management of natural and human resources, ensuring a sustainable character of development in an ecological balance and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage of the territory are the key factors through which a good management ensures territorial cohesion. On the contrary, a bad management is a declared enemy of cohesion, no matter the advantages offered by the other factors.

3.3. The role territorial cohesion has within spatial planning

All of the above show that territorial cohesion is in the summit of a trophic chain that includes all the other geographical, economic, social, infrastructure-related, environmental, good management features, as distinct links of the spatial entity under-discussion. This aspect needs to be strongly emphasized, as there is no doubt about the position of territorial cohesion. This position explains the function territorial cohesion has as a synthesis, as an integrative element, a *marker of the state of the territory*. At any level of the territory, from local level to regional one, to be cohesive means to function at optimum parameters, in a systemic way, with a high productivity. Territorial cohesion will faithfully illustrate the degree of inter-relationship among elements and the active cooperation among them, horizontally and vertically, along with a flexibility of its dynamics and lastly, the capacity to adapt and to be resilient. In this way, that territory becomes competitive, at least in comparison with others, where territorial cohesion is not fully accomplished.

On the other hand, due to the diversity of the elements that make up the structure of territorial cohesion and their direct involvement in the process of spatial planning, another conclusion takes shape, namely that territorial cohesion becomes a *major desideratum of spatial planning*. This is a new characteristic of territorial cohesion. Territorial cohesion is the aim of spatial planning, as it comprises physical structures, social units, political visions and actions in a unitary whole. Consequently, territorial cohesion that involves the existence of economic and social cohesion, as a *sine qua non* requirement for its achievement, becomes a corollary of all planning actions and of the functional organization of the territory. The plans and strategies designed in this sense have territorial cohesion as major methodological coordinate.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the territorial cohesion phenomenon revealed an active dynamic of this concept, the Brownian character of interpretations, un-established limits of its significances.

The concept is applied to the territory and receives complex connotations, thus becoming a key factor for the good performance of any spatial system. Thus, we have the best definition of territorial cohesion, namely a *feature of structural and functional nature of the territory, aimed to eliminate its dysfunctions and make its inter-relations and productivity optimal*.

The implementation of territorial cohesion concept can not be done without deciphering its inner structure, the elements that make it up, that are arranged in a trophic chain that reunites, in an inter-relational way, physical specificities of the territory, natural and human resources, environmental

features and those related to the mental space within a certain environment, technical infrastructure, economic and social cohesion and a good management of the administrative entities on it.

The paper emphasizes *the role of marker of the state of the territory* territorial cohesion has and the need to make it *an important desideratum of any spatial planning initiative*.

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