

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL TERRITORIAL COHESION: CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION – HOW CAN SOME EU INSTRUMENTS CREATE A NEW GEOGRAPHY?

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Abstract

The future of European cohesion policy is about to be prepared and discussed: One of the main novelties is the concept of territorial cohesion, which can only be achieved by the effective, integrated development of (inner) peripheral border areas. To serve this territorial continuity and connection better there are some innovative instruments for planners and policy-makers. This study describes the cross-border spatial planning possibilities of the EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) tool. It estimates how it can contribute to the regeneration of the spatial connections and local economic development in border areas. As a result of an innovative and efficient regional policy, the geography of border areas is changing very dynamically. The study confirms how this social, spatial, economic and political phenomena can be analysed by geographical methods and confirms the role and importance of geographers is in this new European “space making” process.

Keywords: cross-border cooperation, cross-border geography, territorial cohesion, EGTC, borders

1. INTRODUCTION – TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES IN EUROPE

EU regional policy has, since its origin, tried to support the reduction of inequalities in the development of European regions, although with uneven success. However, while clear progress in developmental trends may appear, general differences still exist between regions (Heidenreich 2003) and between urban areas and countryside remain sharp (Niebuhr and Stiller 2003). Moreover regions in recession may also be encountered.

Differences in productivity and in employment rate reflect the capacity of a country or region to mobilize its human potential. This capability correlates with the structure and organization of the labour market and its articulation with the system of social reproduction (Dunford 1996). Regional inequality, in per worker output, in the European Union is closely

linked to intrinsic differences among regions. The importance of national and spatial location components are decisive factors across European regions (Ezcurra, Pascual and Rapún 2007).

Serious territorial disparities may be found at a continental scale. Figure 1 clearly shows that there are still significant GDP differences between Western and Eastern Europe. The boundary of the so-called Iron Curtain still serves as a development borderline. Furthermore, serious territorial disparities may also be experienced at lower, regional, micro-regional scales. Using Hungary as an example, 85 % of the least developed, so-called “lagging behind” micro-regions of the country are located in close proximity to a border (Figure 2). Such phenomena are certainly not specific to Hungary, as similar impasses of development have evolved along the European borders which previously had mainly produced ‘separating’ effects.

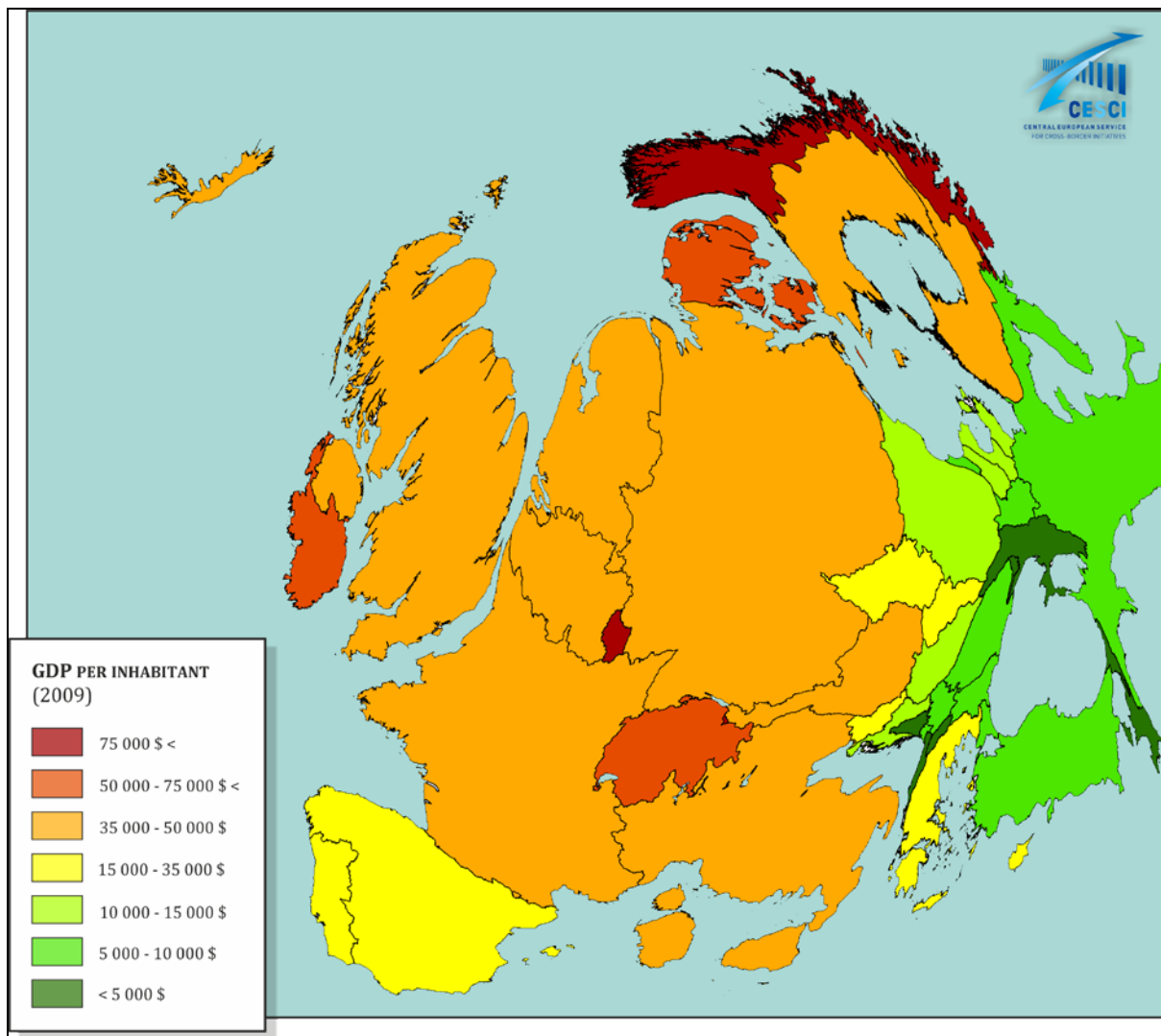


Figure 1. Territorial disparities in Europe

Source : compiled by the author, CEECI

Several pieces of evidence are available on developmental disparities and trends characterising Europe (e. g. Dunford 1994, Boldrin-Canova-Pischke-Puga 2001, Sokol 2001, Pittau-Zelli-Gelman 2010, Petrakos-Kallioras-Anagnostou 2011, and ESPON projects e. g.

SURE, SS-LR, TEDI etc.). This study, accepting these research results as a starting point, focuses exclusively on the roles of state borders out of several features in the background of European heterogeneity. Through the estimation of the role of borders, in addition to consideration of EU policies and instruments for development and cooperation, the paper tries to reveal an evolving new geography stressing the importance of territorial cohesion in cross-border areas. With a more theoretical focus (based on applied evidence) it highlights the key function of borders in reducing developmental disparities within the European Union.



Figure 2. Regions in Hungary lagging behind

Source : compiled by the author, CESCO

Therefore the positioning of boundaries separating and slowing down spatial development processes and spatial relationships often correlate with the location of the regions showing higher territorial inequalities. Consequently the question of borders is of great importance in managing territorial disparities of Europe.

2. THE ROLE OF BORDERS

Easing development disparities cannot be successful without understanding territorial processes. The appropriate interpretation of a territorial “dimension” can have an influence on the functioning and development of social structures. Moreover, it seems that the role of space will have greater importance. “Our age (...) can be the era of space. We live the age of simultaneity, co-ordination, the near and far, rightwards and leftwards and spreading. It is such a moment (...) wherein the world looks on itself not as life rising through time, but a net linking spots and intercrossing fibres.” (Foucault 1972). The concept of the social production of space is also critical during its examination (Lefebvre 1974). Accordingly, space is a social construction determined by values, various meanings and interpretations. All these have an

influence on our everyday acts and how we consider the world around us. Therefore, space has an ideological function. Space is defined by the way that it comes into existence as the inseparable unity of spaces of everyday life, abstract spaces as well as spaces that exist in our minds (Lefebvre 1974). Space can be considered as one component of production power of society. Borders and cross-border areas breaking the continuance of this production power have great importance from the aspect of territorial cohesion.

Borders are a spatial element separating different parts of space from each other. They shape territories from space, since the territory is an enclosed part of space. Contrary to the squarely fixed presence of modern administrative borders, social-cultural borders are mobile. They tend to be in constant movement instead of edged borders, in which transitions, mosaics and spatial heterogeneity are more typical.

The definition of a border can be understood through its functions, or rather, how the border separates or connects certain territories (Nijkamp, Rietveld and Salomon, 1990). Consequently, it can operate as a barrier or a 'separating space element', or a filter zone with gates, edges and frontiers as well as contact zones (Nemes Nagy 1998). Borders can also be categorised as mental or physical. Physical borders can be classified as frontier type (political, cultural, population), as well as boundary type (natural and artificial) border zones (Hardi 2000). In many cases, natural and mental borders influence the physical-geographical space as well. Van Houtum (1998) has defined a series of opposite pairs to characterise border zones, such as: natural-artificial, functional-emotional, concrete-abstract, opened-closed. David Newman (2006) emphasizes the process-based nature of borders. He determines the stages of formation, institutionalisation, sustainability, closing, opening, terminating, where the duration and order of certain stages depends on the actual political and economic circumstances.

Guichonnet and Raffestin (1974) define the classical border function typology into five different categories: legal function, fiscal function, checking function, military function and ideological function. These allow the practice of sovereign state power; the legal function fixes the limits of practice of power; fiscal function can be considered through laying down customs; as a result of a checking function the state can filter the factors which stream into or out of a specific country. Today, the military function of a border has much lower relevance than before as a result of the development of military technology. The ideological function can be recognised by separating "us" and "them". The border, as an individual space element with important roles, assigns special functions to the areas near to it. At cross-border areas there is a need for cross-border co-operation at a certain level among local actors (e.g. cross-border management of catchment areas, cross-border labour force-migration).

The nature and type of certain borders and cross-border areas is changing both spatially and temporally. During recent decades, dynamic changes in the capacity of borders to separate have been typical, especially in Central Europe. Borders that were fully separating have turned into totally permeable borders (eg. between the former Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic). The changes in regimes, the European integration process and the extension of the Schengen area have significantly changed the role of several state borders in Europe. However, separating effects have not been exclusively eased, since in some cases the separating power of the external borders of the Schengen area have been intensified, such as the borders created during the Yugoslav war.

Diverse border functions generate different possibilities for the dissolution of territorial disparities. Different functions of separation resulted in different connection facilities and co-operation opportunities. Because of this, co-operation culture and practice are also formed in

a different way. These processes move at different speeds. Moreover, the dynamic change of border functions is far from at an end, as further realignments are expected in the next decade in Central Europe. Therefore, changing border roles may have a radical effect on the economic, structural and developmental course of an area. It is ascertainable, that in our days the separation role of the European Union's inner political borders has definitely shifted from a barrier function to a contact zone function, while the filter impact is strengthening along the external EU borders (Niebuhr 2006, Diener and Hagen 2012). By this token the co-operative development course of cross border areas comes into prominence: cross-border, transnational and interregional co-operation is promoted by several programmes and great amounts of money from the European Union.

The "fading" and "disappearing" sharp border lines in central and Eastern parts of Europe have had great importance, as radical change has happened in these former socialist countries and late Eastern bloc, leading to an exceptionally intensive and innovative transformational process. The resultant permeable borders mask great potential. Making borders more permeable in addition to having common cohesion policy may result convergence in the long run (Leonardi 1993, Tselios 2009). For cohesion, this has to be capitalised on by drawing suitable development strategies, especially because these territories are often peripheral, lagging behind regions (Topaloglou et al., 2005). Separating borders play an obstructing role to development (Meliciani 2006). Managing cross-border areas as border regions, by capitalising on complementing features may contribute to the opening of these areas, and from there on to the strengthening of territorial cohesion across Europe.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIAL COHESION

Understanding the territorial disparities of Europe, it is not by accident that the focus of cohesion policy stresses the territorial meaning of cohesion. From 2014 a new budget cycle will apply within the EU, accompanied by a dynamically evolving cohesion policy, a refreshed regional policy. Generally speaking, the revised regulations should favourably affect the status of border areas. It seems that territorial cohesion may play an even more significant role than before. Integrated approaches will acquire increased significance during development, and more and more innovative tools of good practice will be available for cross-border cooperation. Increasing resources are available in the framework of the European Territorial Cooperation. With the accession of Croatia, the internal frontier of the EU will increase along the River Drava and new border sections will soon become Schengen borders.

Cohesion is inherently based on the three pillars of concentration, territorial connection and cooperation and supplemented by the increasingly important integrated development approach that has become a more significant part of EU regional policy. Initially, cohesion policy played the role of economically supporting regions socially lagging behind from the average, with specific financial instruments in order to achieve the common EU targets. Parallel to recognising the geographical determination of regional development, the principle of economic and social cohesion (convergence) with territorial cohesion was only completed in the last decade. The appearance of such a principle also means the introduction of a radical new approach: instead of/besides the gradual convergence of the lagging behind regions, the internal spatial relations of the EU, particularity of the regions, has attracted increasing attention, ensuring Community frameworks for regional development treated as the competency of the Member States. The incorporation of territorial cohesion to EU cohesion

policy cannot be separated from the process, as regional and urban development has gradually gained ground in Community-wide discourse.

Since the 1980's significant changes have occurred in the orientation of spatial planning (Figure 3). The directives of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) adopted in 1999 used to refer to the balance of the urban network, the development of infrastructure and the protection of natural and cultural heritage. However in the documents discussed and adopted during the Leipzig meeting of 2007, the exploration of the internal potential of the regions and the establishment of a more efficient and more intelligent management were brought to the foreground. The latter should be considered as democratic, multi-level governance with on-going consultation between policies.

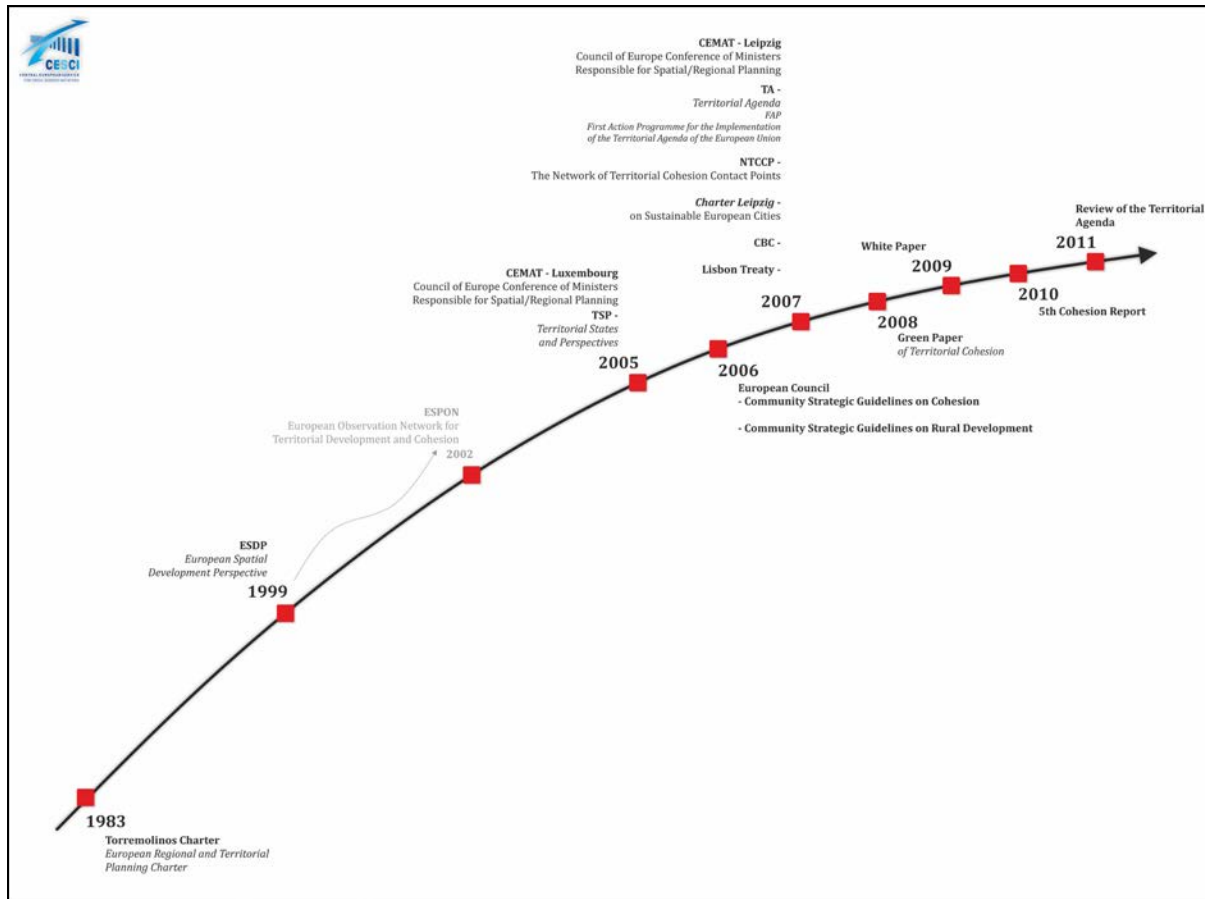


Figure 3. The “evolution” of the principle of territorial cohesion

Source : compiled by the author

In the EU Territorial Agenda attention is drawn to the duality of the conditions of territorial cohesion, accordingly EU policies and local-regional strategies should converge. The importance of territorial cooperation is also mentioned, which is one of the three objectives of 2007 and amongst which instruments there is the establishment of regional clusters and networks. The Green Paper adopted in 2008 is the most important spatial planning document from a methodological point of view, emphasizing the efficiency of industry, integrated problem solving and interventions. The mitigation of phenomena slowing down socio-economic development (3 "D"s: density, distance, division) is deemed essential,

solutions should be elaborated for the removal of specific problems (3 "C"s: concentration, connection, cooperation).

The process should be highlighted also in a geographical aspect, which has since 1983 considerably but steadily, increasingly aspired to leak the principles of territorial cohesion and integrated development approach to the practice of planning. Today, the mainstream of European Union Regional Development has reached the point where the principle of territorial cohesion is truly the main principle. The first instruments for a proper integrated development approach have evolved. Today, due to the interpretation of the EU, each dimension (e.g. social or economic) of cohesion has a spatial (if you prefer, geographical) aspect and a regional view pervades the entire approach – essentially, with social and economic aspects also considered as elements of territorial cohesion by the cohesion policy. Following 2014, during the programming period, territorial cohesion will play an even more significant role, supported by the Fifth Cohesion Report published in 2010 (Breska 2010). Frameworks for post-2014 cohesion policy of the EU 2020 Strategy, are specified by the Territorial Agenda revised in 2011 and the regulations of cohesion policy. The resulting policy documents came to conclusions which today define the range of instruments (e.g. the importance of community planning, the need for sectorial integration, the possibility of creating an integration of financial sources, etc.) expected after 2014. New emerging possibilities outlined around the principle of territorial cohesion may serve as a framework for the re-organization of border regions, which in turn sets up a new path for the dynamics of the development of such specific regions.

This study covers the geographical aspects of spatial re-organization supporting the expected territorial cohesion of border regions between 2014 and 2020. An emphasis is put on the tools expected to become increasingly important, the general cooperation and regional development benefits, which can be provided by the EGTC for border regions. Finally, the study also indicates the possible role of geography within such new spatial planning processes.

4. EU INSTRUMENTS IN THE SERVICE OF BOUNDARY DISSOLUTION: THE EMERGING FIELD OF THE SPATIAL ORGANIZATION SECTOR

In addition to the conceptual framework supporting the development of cross-border programs and the renewed cohesion policy, the future of cross-border co-operation is also fundamentally determined by EGTC Regulation. After all, this framework of cooperation principally provides institutional options which were not available earlier. Therefore it is necessary to briefly describe the nature of EGTC with consideration to the developments expected after 2014 (Jaschitz 2012). Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 enables the formation of European Groupings for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Following the Community Law document, each Member State has to accept relevant national legislation, furthermore the regulation allows the participation of other non-EU "third" countries as well.

The EGTC is a cross-border, primarily municipal or governmental grouping, which may act as an independent legal entity in each membership State. It may provide work for its own employees, and is entitled to create and maintain common institutions and business associations. This fact, on the one hand provides highly flexible institutional solutions, but on the other hand allows the establishment of permanent cross-border structures, which enable the integrated sectorial or comprehensive regional development of a border region. EGTC is therefore a cooperative structure, an instrument for programme and project management supporting

the sectorial or territorial development of a particular region, and a financing solution providing an optimal use of resources.

The EGTCs registered so far can be categorised into four main types according to their functions (Figure 4). Most of the EGTCs established set the direct development of a border area as their goal. These groupings can be defined as EGTCs for border area development. They are intended for long-term territorial cooperation, implementation of common development and the establishment and maintenance of common institutions ensuring the sustainability of the results of development. Such EGTCs may be considered to be the next generation of the Euroregional cooperation as they elevate work started within the Euroregions, Eurodistricts and other organizational frameworks to a higher level (Ocskay and Jaschitz 2010). The operation of networking, programming and project types of EGTCs may also greatly contribute to the breakdown of the separating ability of boundaries. Moreover, the importance of EGTCs in cross-border developments are expected to rise further after 2014, as there are more and more Europe-wide good practices in relation to the use of the instrument, accordingly the General and ETC Regulations gives them high priority as well.

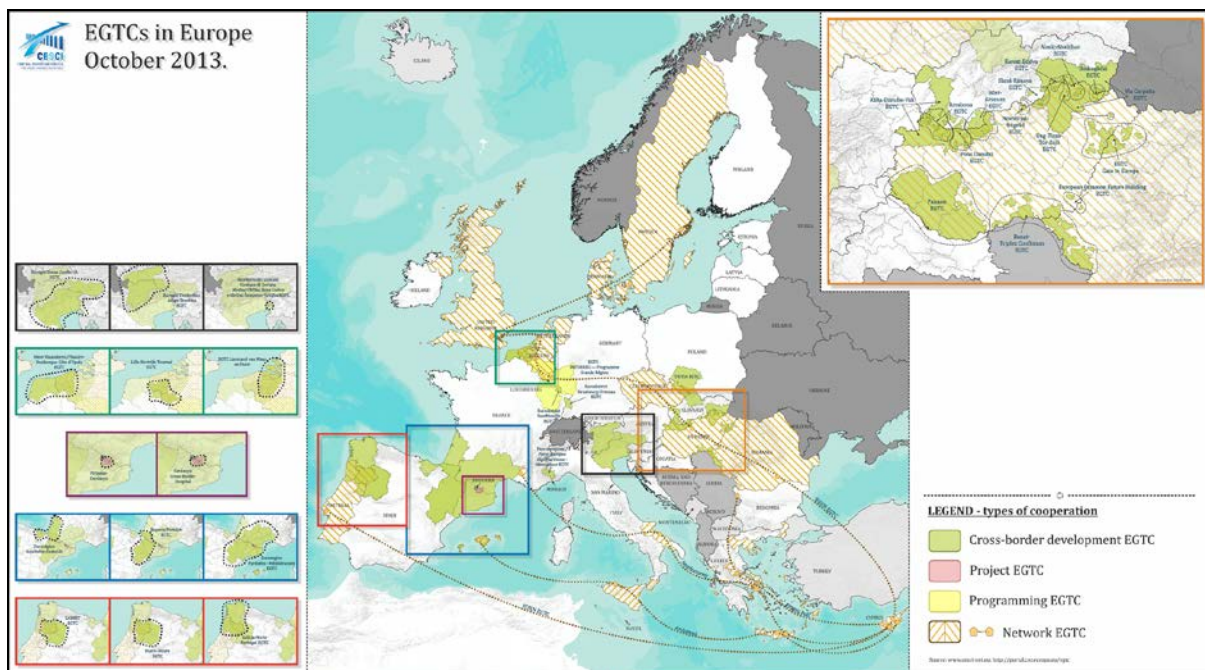


Figure 4. Types of EGTCs in Europe

Source : compiled by the author, CESCI

A further essential point is that the third pillar of the provisions concerning territorial cohesion in the new cohesion policy is to emphasise the governance of territorial development. As a result of the White Paper on Multilevel Governance, cohesion policy and administration are closely intertwined and essentially unthinkable in the absence of each other. This model of multilevel governance allows a territorial approach to replace the sectoral one, thus providing a new structure for economic development.

An adequate institutional solution for such development work is the EGTC institute located at border areas. Multilevel governance is also considered to be an essential instrument by the revised Territorial Agenda. The above-mentioned integrated territorial approach also assists in the creation of cross-border functional regions, but requires the introduction of

multi-level governance models. The General Regulation raises multilevel governance among the general principles of programming and implementation (Preamble para. (9), Part II, Article 5). EGTC appears in the Preamble of the ETC Regulation as one of the instruments for this coordination (ETC Regulations Preamble (28)). This provision confers EGTCs, grouping local-regional participants mainly, with such powers, which were previously available only to nation-states, and such a fact enables a radical new approach with respect to planning and programming along the border area.

In view of the above and in light of the development of ideas concerning the territorial cohesion within the European Union, EGTC can be considered to be the most innovative and most likely future-oriented community cohesion initiatives that may contribute to both the development of the border areas and the dissolution of separating role of borders. The instrument may provide help in many areas, such as managing common institutions and business associations, and enhancing of social relationships. Therefore it is also projected that connections emerging within the framework of EGTC may provide a novel, more vivid pattern to the cooperation and both internal and external economic dynamics of a region.

However, the new spheres of cooperation emerging within the new frameworks along the EU borders should still only be considered a pseudo-structure. Their spatiality is characterized by specific dualities. EGTCs can be considered as a sort of parallel public administration structure. Its participants are identical to those of the national administration systems. However in this structure they have to represent different objectives and they have different competencies compared with the ones they have within their national administration. Moreover, also in terms of their territoriality, a confused design is unfolding: they overlap with national structures (and possibly also other cooperation structures) in such a way that relevant holes remain in the system. This results in a spatial structure simultaneously showcasing a range of different spatial organization purposes and concurrent spatial structures.

It is perceptible that an EGTC institution offers a very wide range of possibilities for the efficient development of border regions. The EGTC institution is theoretically suitable for sustaining long-term living cooperation and to redraw the spatial structures of Europe slashed by nation-state borders of today. However, in order that these goals can be achieved with positive consequences, Europe should proceed very carefully. The incorporation of modifying effects on spatial organization may be expected only in the most clearly justified cases serving this above long-term goal (long-term maintenance of cooperation). The founding of an EGTC would be most favourable in areas which have actual, specific development plans, where such groupings can provide an initial boost to that initiative, but cooperation is not expected to become void after its purpose has been achieved. There are still opportunities for the EGTC to identify new targets for itself. Such circumstances cannot be artificially produced, much less maintained. The fulfilment of this condition is most likely to happen if cooperation was reached as part of a territory of an a priori (or earlier) organic development with natural connections. Long-term financing and motivational background for EGTC activity can only be expected to develop in such an environment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Summarising the findings of this study three topics stand out. Firstly, considering the territorial disparities of Europe, EU cohesion policy and the special role of the borders, it can be stated that without successful cross-border cooperation structures, real territorial cohesion

cannot be realised. The role of the borders - slowing down, breaking and reshaping spatial communication - is so strong such that the course of the activities in overcoming the territorial differences could be underestimated. Recognition of this may also be deduced from the frameworks offered by new cohesion policy.

The second important consideration is that these special, spatially organized border areas can be redefined not only in theory, but their territorial connections can also react very sensitively to policy interventions. The extensive application of EU policies, subsidies, development and cooperation tools also changes the geography of these regions in practice, but to different extents and dynamics. A new, quite complex, space-making process is evolving among the borders of the EU.

Finally, in terms of geography as a science, an important conclusion is that this emerging space-making process also has great relevance in territorial development policy. For the establishment of a proper development policy, truly achieving territorial cohesion, the scientific cognition of these new spatial processes is essential. As for these examinations, geographical research provides the most comprehensive range of instruments as the interventions will also be geographical in nature, trying to influence the geography of Europe in the long run. Geography offers a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, synthesis of knowledge about territorial relationships necessary for the objective exploration of these complex processes. In addition, it also possesses those quantitative and qualitative spatial analysis methods, by means of which the renewal of spatial processes can be mapped, analysed and predicted. Through its two strengths, geography should play a significant role in the research of border areas of Europe and in the preparation of decisions on development policy concerning regional cohesion.

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