



The RSA Research Network on EU COHESION POLICY

RSA workshop on the EU Cohesion Policy: Focus on The Territorial Dimension

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TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES AND COHESION: COHESION POLICY IN THE TRAP OF MEASURING

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Abstract

Selecting the appropriate indicator for analysing and evaluating a process and measuring the levels and changes is particularly important for any policy which aims to influence the process into a required state or direction. Since the very beginning the evaluation and the main objectives of the EU cohesion policy are oriented to the differences or gaps of various economic and social indicators. The principle measure for the orientation of territorial cohesion is the GDP/capita that is a good indicator for many purposes (particularly for the regional policy) but the essential characteristics of cohesion are lost owing to this way of measuring. In addition the separation of economic and social cohesion from territorial cohesion results in a loss of territorial synthesis, and hinders the adaptation of spatial approach. On the basis of the analysis of the concept of cohesion in physical and social sciences with focus on spatial aspect the outlined approach to cohesion makes a distinction between catching-up oriented and cohesion oriented regional policy. They don't exclude each-other because decreasing economic and social gaps between territorial units undoubtedly may contribute to the cohesion of the territorial units but it is not necessary. The closer is the economic and social sphere of territorial units to each-other, the better is the chance for cohesion between them.

The distinction between the two attitudes is particularly important from the aspect of smart, sustainable and inclusive regional development which may contribute not only to growth but to cohesion at the EU level, too. The concentration of a catching-up oriented regional policy to economic aspects – according to several experiences – may create serious social and political conflicts. On the other side overemphasizing the social aspects may result economic failures. This is why in the frame of a spatial synthesis the necessity of recognizing mutual interdependencies, and creating, identifying mutual interests both for the economic and the social actors and between their territorial units should be a key point for effective cohesion within and between regions.

Several measuring opportunities are raised for discussion. The interdependencies of individual EU member countries – as a first step to approach to the strength of their cohesion to each-other – are analysed on the basis of their mutual export and import activities.

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