



# The RSA Research Network on EU COHESION POLICY

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

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## **THE MANY OBJECTIVES OF COHESION POLICY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE POST 2020 TERRITORIAL DIMENSION**

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### **Abstract**

Since Territorial cohesion has been listed among the Union's objectives in the Treaty on the European Union (Article 3 TUE), the 2014-2020 programming period of Cohesion Policy is the first programming cycle in which this objective has been implemented. This has led to a clear territorial storyline in the programming period with a focus on responsabilisation of sub-national authorities and stimulating cross-thematic investments based on place-specific needs. But territorial cohesion is not the sole objective of Cohesion policy. Other important objectives of the 2014-2020 period are result orientation, alignment to the Europe 2020 strategy and simplification, each being implemented in different provisions and each being explained in different guidance from the Commission. Now that the Operational Programmes have been approved, the focus of the Cohesion Policy cycle will switch to implementation and, already rather soon, to reflexion on the post 2020 period. Since results of the current period will only be visible within a few years time, once projects are well under way, these reflexions will be mostly informed by evaluations of the 2007-2013 period. Nevertheless, it can be analysed how the above mentioned objectives have been implemented in the regulations. This has led to the current regular framework that partly determines to which extent the objectives can be achieved because different objectives of the policy interconnect, sometimes reinforcing each other, sometimes working in opposite directions. To this end the paper will answer the following research question:

1) Under which circumstances do the objectives of result orientation, alignment to the Europe 2020 strategy and simplification work against the objective of territorial cohesion?

The hypothesis is that the way some objectives of the current Cohesion policy period are translated into the regulatory framework and consequently defended by the Commission, work, in several cases, counter the objective of territorial cohesion as defined by Cohesion policy.

The paper will answer this research question by analysing the Cohesion Policy regulations and secondary documentation produced by the Commission such as guidances. As a first step the paper will describe how the objectives of territorial cohesion, result orientation, alignment to the Europe 2020 strategy and simplification are translated into the regulatory framework. The second step will be the identification of possibly conflicting elements.

The main finding is that in some cases the way the different objectives have been implemented indeed goes

against the objective of territorial cohesion. This is for instance the case for the stated goal of limiting the number of investment priorities as a way of Europe 2020 strategy alignment versus the requirement of a cross-thematic investment mix as a way to pursue territorial cohesion. The paper will conclude with some first recommendations for the design of the post 2020 architecture, assuming that territorial cohesion will continue to be one of the main objectives of the policy.

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