



# The RSA Research Network on EU COHESION POLICY

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

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## FROM THE PERI-URBAN WITHIN TERRITORIAL AND COHESION POLICY AND PROGRAMMING, THE MISSING IMPERATIVE

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### Abstract

If we accept the proposition that European Union cohesion policy has a role to play in bringing about balanced territorial development, we had best be clear exactly what we mean by both “cohesion” and “territorial” before we start using the phrase “territorial cohesion” in quite so free a way as is often the case.

If furthermore we see the Territorial Agenda 2020 as something worthy of implementation and development (and we do, as will shortly be argued), then we need also to be able to convince a sceptical audience of exactly what we mean when we use a typology about different sorts of territory, and; how these concepts should directly shape territorial development strategies at national and sub-national levels in different parts of Europe – including the points where these strategies directly interface with plans for the European Structural and Investment Fund.

In this paper we set out to demonstrate that none of the above can be carried out effectively until we fully recognise and understand the nature and role of “peri-urban” territories. What we will also want to argue in the fullness of time is that this recognition and acceptance of the peri-urban extends across all aspects of cohesion policy - social, economic and territorial and to all dimensions of Europe 2020 growth - smart, sustainable and inclusive.

Let us for now however focus on TA2020 and the older ESDP for the purposes of making this paper of a manageable size. At the same time we won't wholly ignore related initiatives such as the EU Urban Agenda, initiatives such as “Land as a Resource” and the territorial dimension of Europe 2020 itself.

The Territorial Agenda 2020 is of central importance to us because here is our hoped-for guarantor of the consideration of the territorial dimension in all policy areas. TA2020 is also important from the stance of anyone wishing to be a proponent of the peri-urban, insofar as it places such a strong emphasis on polycentric development and the fact that such development patterns reflect complicated interactions and interdependencies between places of different sizes within larger functional geographies. Indeed although, polycentric development and the peri-urban are not synonymous, the first is hugely characteristic of the second

In terms of governance and how work is given due emphasis and a mechanism to progress, what are we make of a call from the Committee of the Regions for instance for a new Council to look at Cohesion Policy on an

ongoing basis as part of the formal institutional architecture? Again, the call is couched in the context of TA2020 and if the option is pursued in earnest, its (the TA2020's) significance will increase all the more.

“Place” is now overtly more centre-stage in TA2020 considerations than ever. And just what is meant by “place” is becoming more nuanced; for example, it now routinely includes a consideration of “identity” and cultural history etc – that is to be applauded. The subject is approached in different ways but seems to more or less uniformly be rooted in recognition that places are different one from another in a myriad of ways and face different challenges requiring different solutions. The resulting challenge for policy-makers and programme shapers alike is presumably therefore to give at the same time both shape and flexibility to enable these more place-specific measures to be effectively adopted – to enable and support testing and experimentation, to help develop models within funding programmes and in other ways that might facilitate real change in local circumstances. So far so simple. BUT, it will prove far from simple if our basic understanding about territory – let us be lazy and say “physical space” – revolves around an old-style urban-rural dualism that in fact is not right.

Where urban and rural co-exist there is peri-urban. There is considerable emphasis placed on urban-rural (or rural-urban depending on which part of which institution a paper emerges from) links or linkages. Where direct co-existence occurs, linking is not a helpful term, urban and rural features and characteristics co-exist in the same landscape, the same micro-economy and the same set of complex human interrelationships to name just three examples. Any reference to "urban-rural links" is unhelpful as it immediately disallows the possibility that there is a third category of territory already .. and that there has been for a very long time.

There are specificities relating to the peri-urban, they are every bit as real and valid as urban or rural specificities, and they warrant equal weight in designing place-based policy and programmes. To superimpose an urban – or a rural – understanding of place on a peri-urban area is to set up policy and practice that will fail from the outset. It serves to render peri-urban invisible as opposed to recognising how the urban relies on the peri-urban - a point made as recently as last month when the Commission reflected on responses received to its Urban Agenda consultation exercise.”.

How are policy makers, programme makers and planners more generally to meet this challenge? By recognising and embracing the concept certainly; by being brave enough to acknowledge that the old dualism really doesn't apply any longer and by implementing that understanding in a practical way, by writing peri-urban into both the general lexicon and into key policy and programme documents. Every policy area and every programme design exercise needs to recognise the territorial reality. Without doing so, fallacies are spread, confusions increase, paradoxes abound and an increasing number of nonsensical remarks are made and diagrams produced.

Let there be an explicit recognition of the peri-urban dimension and contribution and it sounds like a call to do something about it too!!!. It is as good a starting point as any for a detailed exploration of how to make real and overt what many of us know to be the case - the peri-urban has a huge contribution to make but is hampered from doing so by policy lag and programme misconception, a false position beyond which cohesion policy needs to move.

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