

The Relevance of the Territorial Dimension in EU Policies and the Role of Tourism

Abstract

The disparities, inequalities as well as the different trajectories of social and economic development that still characterize the regions of the EU today demonstrate the importance of a debate on the spatial dimension of European policies. This paper analyses the implications of strengthening the spatial dimension in the different EU programs, highlighting the importance of the concept of territorial cohesion and the role that a strategic sector such as tourism can play in implementing this concept. Therefore, the added value of tourism and the potential of territorial cohesion should play an important role in future European policies and funding.

Keywords: territorial cohesion, regional policies, territory, tourism, EU

1. Introduction

Officially introduced for the first time during the Assembly of European Regions in Antwerp in 1995, territorial cohesion (TC) represents a meaningful concept that further declines the objectives of the European Union. It overcomes divergences and disparities between European regions by paying greater attention to the need to achieve a territorial and a spatial integration, as well. It is a concept that focuses on key issues, such as the right for all EU citizens to have equal access to essential facilities, basic infrastructure, and advanced services, regardless of where they live or work, as reported in the Treaty of Amsterdam. It is a concept that goes beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion (EC and SC). It pushes European policies to contribute to a more balanced development by (i) reducing existing disparities and avoiding territorial imbalances, (ii) improving the coherence between sectoral policies with territorial political impact and regional policies, and (iii) strengthening territorial integration and promoting cooperation between regions. The EU's efforts to implement funding policies and programs that meet these goals have not been lacking over the past decades. For instance, the Interreg or Territorial Cooperation programs implemented since the 1990s are emblematic of these attempts: they pushed the EU Regions to define common strategies to consolidate territorial integration, and implement operational projects in sectors such as infrastructure, transport, knowledge rather than accessibility, and sustainability. Moreover, as reconstructed in this paper, these efforts have contributed to pushing EU regions and local authorities to activate a more virtuous process of modernization of public policies, spreading good practices based on a fundamental unit of reference, the "territory" and the various meanings that it can assume. The result is the shift from a government logic to a governance one, rather than from a logic based on planning to one representing a pact for the territory.

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Within this framework, the implementation of interregional initiatives in the field of tourism can also constitute a valid instrument for the achievement of the objectives of territorial cohesion (Abrahams, 2014). However, tourism research as a regional study still needs further development (Calero & Turner, 2019), and we need to question more about its contribution to regional development and the reduction of regional disparities (Vu & Turner, 2006; Zhou-Grundy & Turner, 2014, Calero & Turner, 2019). In EU cohesion policies, tourism is not explicitly mentioned as an engine of territorial cohesion but as a factor of economic growth and social development. It is, therefore, necessary to examine through a different lens the contribution that tourism can give to achieving cohesion objectives while overcoming the standardization that implements current initiatives and projects in the tourism sector. On the other hand, tourism makes it possible to enhance many categories of resources, from natural to cultural or anthropic ones, in central rather than peripheral regions, in more developed rather than disadvantaged ones, creating synergies between areas with diverging needs, rebalancing any imbalances.

This paper, therefore, aims to highlight the role that tourism can play in achieving the EU's cohesion objectives. In the following sections we provide a reinterpretation of the meaning of territorial cohesion, outlining the purposes, the tools and the role played by local authorities for its implementation. The second part aims to highlight the potential that the tourism sector offers in this context. Finally, we show the suitability of European programs and projects implemented during recent EU Programming periods to support this possibility. The paper concludes with recommendations on the next steps to be taken to strengthen the contribution that tourism can offer to the objectives of the European Union.

2. The territorial dimension discourse - Literature and policy review

The interest of European institutions in the territorial dimension of public policies has increased in recent decades, reaching its peak in the last two EU planning periods. Academic research is also interested in understanding the meaning, operational, and application consequences of introducing a spatial dimension into European cohesion policies (Camagni, 2008; Faludi, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2013; Medeiros, 2016; Ortega et al., 2012; Mirwaldt et al. 2009; Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020; Zaucha & Böhme, 2020; Marques et al., 2018). This interest has not only increased in intensity over the years but has also been contextualized with greater qualitative precision around fundamental economic concepts that are consistent with historical periods of the European Union. It revolves around issues related to the compensation of locational disadvantages, urban regeneration, growth problems, regional imbalances, and social marginalization, as well as the vision of an appropriate and sustainable use of territorial resources (Faludi, 2007; Davoudi, 2005). In the 1970s, this issue was only marginally present in Community debates, as the delicate political balance following reunification and post-enlargement imposed more pressing agendas. These included the agricultural, environmental, and industrial debates on the geographical disadvantages of individual farms, the need to develop new methods, now known as the environmental impact assessment, and the conversion of productive activities.

The Regional Policy, launched in the 1980s, directed EU policymakers toward local realities, not only by distinguishing between more or less developed Structural Fund areas but also by introducing the "land element" into planning. This dimension was further reinforced in the 1990s with the advent of programs and dedicated implementation bodies. The Committee of the Regions and the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON, 2007) provide informed support for Community policies, even though they do not have a formal mandate for EU territorial affairs. Unfortunately, the credible evidence documented during this decade has not been fully translated into concrete actions.

Europe 2000 (Commission of the European Communities [CEC], 1991) was one of the first documents to identify the main problems of European spatial development that are still relevant today. Among the most important are: the marginalization of the poorest and peripheral areas and the associated migratory movements,

anthropogenic environmental problems such as waste disposal, inefficient European transport networks, and the uncontrolled use of land.

Location theory is an elementary component of economic geography, regional science, and spatial economics. During its development, it has included considerations of regional and spatial aspects and provided interpretations for the European context. At the regional level, the spatial concentration of economic activities can exacerbate existing regional imbalances, making the poor even poorer while at the same time overburdening, internally unbalancing, fragmenting, or segregating rich areas. This realization led policymakers to seek solutions through dialogues that would enable balance for both strong and weak areas and regions.

The imbalances are recognized in the subsequent Europe 2000+ (CEC, 1994) document. It focuses on the imbalances in the richest areas, particularly the urban ones, which are demographically and economically dynamic, as they are the decision-making centers and locations of the most relevant economic and financial activities. On the other hand, they are also the places where the risk of social exclusion is highest. As for the strategic capabilities between the strongest and weakest centers mentioned earlier, the proposed model focuses on local endogenous potential, improving both environmental and capital resources and the local labor force. The quantum leap from the past is thus the undoubtedly more scientific approach, even if it is coherently and understandably linked to the contemporary discourse of regional science at the time and the revival of location theory with its reinterpretation in terms of unbalanced growth and social exclusion. In order to pursue the general objective of balanced and sustainable development, the Ministers of Spatial Planning at the Potsdam Council adopted the European Spatial Development Perspective - ESDP (CEC, 1999). This non-binding document introduced 'territory' as a new dimension, made clear that EU-related policies must be assessed from a subsidiarity perspective, and discussed policy options for balanced territory development. But the benefit of this document is that we immediately understand why the need to introduce a territorial dimension stems from a variety of issues that recall territory in its spatial concept.

The document clarifies the contributions and objectives of spatial development policies:

- to work towards a balanced and sustainable development of EU territories;
- to ensure that the three fundamental goals of European policy are equally achieved in all EU regions;
- to boost economic and social cohesion;
- to foster the conservation and management of natural resources and cultural heritage;
- to reach more balanced competitiveness of the European territory.

The ESDP was drawn up in the particular period of EU enlargement and the consolidation of the Single European Market. The ESDP highlights the consideration that regional, national or community projects in one country have a significant impact on the spatial structure of other Member States. This is a consequence of increasing economic and social integration and the more intense relationships and interdependencies that have developed between cities and regions. The need for an integrated and coordinated EU policy seeks to address the problem of territorial imbalances while maintaining the following policy directions:

- developing a balanced and polycentric urban system and a new urban-rural relationship;
- ensuring equal access to infrastructure and knowledge, sustainable development, prudent management, and protection of natural and cultural heritage.

The need for a territorial dimension thus stems from the need to introduce additional elements into European development conditions, which the ESDP has introduced as an innovation:

- a strategic overview of each territory, which is not only a place containing resources but also a place where land policies for sustainable resource use must be implemented, according to a strategic vision of both competition and cooperation among territories;

- a deeper understanding of the relationship between the exchange of functions between cities and rural areas, which also activates mechanisms of local participation;
- polycentric spatial planning to give a role to the new spatial aggregations forming around the big cities, in a vision that promotes competitiveness and interconnectedness. This can be done through synergies and complementarities that give the smaller cities an economic role and the impetus for an endogenous growth process;
- integration of transport policies and their environmental impact;
- equality of social and economic conditions for people, regardless of their localization;
- new schemes for policy implementation that should be integrated and coordinated with a multi-level approach.

Furthermore, special attention is given to cooperation in the field of regional development between the Member States and among their regions and local authorities in the interest of closer European integration: the ESPD "is a suitable reference document for encouraging cooperation while at the same time respecting the principle of subsidiarity" (CEC, 1999). The necessity ultimately derives from the recognition of the strategic interdependence between territories, which is functional for economic and social cohesion. The EU's interest in territorial issues in relation to planning has always been strong and has changed over time from the simplest transversal insertion to the anticipation of increasingly "ad hoc" programs. The 1994-1999 Interreg II program aimed to support cross-border cooperation and regional and urban planning and served as a recovery action for urban areas in crisis, as well. It addresses issues already identified by ESPD: geographically disadvantaged areas, the strategic role of cities, urban-rural relations, access to infrastructure and services, and sustainability (Bachtler & Yuill, 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2003). Both ESPD and Interreg are interesting as they underline the need to coordinate regional policies, always due to the interdependence of territories and to address some specific issues such as urban regeneration.

In the EU planning period 2000-2006, the territorial dimension was placed at the heart of EU regional policy by promoting transnational, cross-border, and interregional cooperation, intensifying social and economic interventions for the regeneration of urban areas, and addressing the already well-known problems of rural areas and the problems of discrimination and inequality in the labor market. In the 2007-2013 period, the territorial dimension is confirmed as part of the three main objectives of the Cohesion Policy to stimulate cross-border cooperation and find joint solutions to problems such as urban, rural, and coastal development, the creation of economic relations, and SME networking. In the 2014-2020 planning period, these indications and objectives have been maintained. The importance of the territorial dimension is underlined by the introduction of a cohesion policy objective related to territorial cooperation.

During the Informal Meeting of Cohesion Ministers on the "Territorial Agenda 2030" (European Union 2020), it was underlined that the issue of "territory" must remain fundamental on the EU's political agenda and that "how too often and for too long policymakers have been spatially blind" (Ferreira, 2020). Therefore, the importance of understanding that a decision and/or a policy can have very different impacts in different places was stressed, and that it is now a top priority to "bridge this gap between general policies and their impact on real people in real places in real time" (Ferreira, 2020). The model of economic convergence in the EU proves that more attention needs to be paid to this dynamic. Differences between countries have decreased, and disparities within countries are increasing, even in those countries that have converged most towards the EU average in recent years. Within the same country, there are differences of more than 100% in GDP per capita (Ferreira, 2020). This is unsustainable from a political, economic, and social perspective. The Covid-19 pandemic has made such divergences and inequalities even more apparent.

3. The concept of territorial cohesion

The concept of territorial cohesion (TC) was first presented at a meeting of the Assembly of European Regions in Anversa in 1995. It was the result of the debate on the issue of territorial development at the European level, which had already begun and opened in the early 1990s with the publication of the Europe 2000 and Europe 2000+ reports. This concept was only formalized and fully integrated into European policy in 1997 with its inclusion in the Treaty of Amsterdam and in 1999 in the ESDP. As a result of the informal meetings of ministers responsible for spatial development held in Rotterdam in November 2004 and in Luxembourg in 2005, the Territorial Agenda of the EU was adopted. This document was then presented at the Ministerial Meeting on Territorial Cohesion in Leipzig on 25 May 2007. It defines three priorities for cohesion:

- guiding national and regional territorial development policies on the best possible development of land resources;
- improving transport and territorial integration by actively promoting cooperation and trade;
- strengthening those EU policies that have a regional impact.

Thus, territorial cohesion becomes an intergovernmental issue, a problem to be addressed at the EU level and integrated into EU policies. The strategic importance of the issue already set out in the "Third Progress Report on Economic and Social Cohesion" (European Commission, 2004), was confirmed by its inclusion in the Treaty of Lisbon (CEC, 2004) among the Union Objectives, alongside the point of social and economic cohesion, and is thus part of the primary law of the Union.

How this objective can be achieved by showing the way to get there is part of the reflections that followed the Territorial Agenda and in parallel with the emergence of the New Treaty. These reflections were summarized and published in October 2008 in the "Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion - Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength" (CEC, 2008). This document is a response to the growing need to define the way in which public policies should respond to the needs of territories by taking up and reopening the debate at TC.

The concept of territorial cohesion can only be understood through a survey reading of the official EU documents mentioned above and, in particular, the explanations in the Cohesion Reports. Two articles of the Amsterdam Treaty are particularly meaningful for this topic. Article 2 describes the central objective of the EU to "promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment and to achieve balanced and sustainable development, in particular through the creation of an area without internal frontiers, the strengthening of economic and social cohesion and the establishment of economic and monetary union...". Article 7d states that each Member State "shall have a role in promoting social and territorial cohesion". With regard to territorial cohesion, it can thus be stated that:

- it is a new element complementing the Union's objectives in the field of economic and social cohesion;
- its concept goes beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion and both complements and reinforces it;
- there is a territorial aspect to these issues - people should not be disadvantaged because of where they live or work in the Union, and citizens should have access to essential services, basic infrastructures, and knowledge, highlighting the importance of services of general economic interest in promoting social and territorial cohesion.
- in policy, the objective is to contribute to more balanced development by reducing existing disparities and avoiding territorial imbalances, improving coherence between sectoral policies with territorial impact and regional policy, strengthening territorial integration, and promoting cooperation between regions.

As far as 'balanced development' is concerned, it should first be noted that the settlement pattern of the EU is unique. It is characterized by some 5,000 cities (with a population of between 5,000 and 50,000), and almost 1,000 large towns (with a population of over 50,000) spread across Europe, acting as focal points for economic, social, and cultural activity. There are only a few very large cities in this urban network. Only 7% of people live in cities with more than 5 million inhabitants, compared to 25% in the US, and only 5 EU cities are among the 100 largest cities in the world. However, it is striking that if the distribution of settlements is even on one side, we cannot say the same about the distribution of economic activities, so many urban areas remain congested while other areas have untapped potential. From this point of view, the discourse on the harmonious development of the European economy points to different types of disparities. At the EU level, a high concentration of economic activity and population in the central or pentagonal area. At the national level, the persistence of pronounced imbalances between the main metropolitan areas and the rest of the country in terms of economic development is a particular feature of the accession countries. At the regional level, a widening or at least the persistence of a series of territorial disparities beyond those measured by GDP or unemployment, such as increasing traffic congestion and pollution, the persistence of social exclusion, the existence of rural areas suffering from the economic inadequacy of links with neighboring small and medium-sized countries (Davoudi, 2005). All this has economic but also social and everyday implications. The concept of territorial cohesion addresses these critical aspects by adding a spatial dimension to the difficulties people face. First and foremost, it focuses on areas affected by poverty and social exclusion, where the availability of basic services is often limited.

The justifications for support measures for harmonious growth of the European economy, redefined here in relation to territorial inequalities, can be divided into two typologies: on the one hand, in relation to solidarity as a fundamental principle of the EU and, on the other hand, in economic terms, as the territorial inequalities mentioned affect the overall competitiveness of the EU economy. Therefore, in order to address the social consequences of disparities, one should focus on the suboptimal allocation of resources and the level of economic competitiveness.

Regarding the territorial impact of sectoral and regional policies, it is important to stress that this impact can be both positive and negative. It is important to start from the consideration that coordination between sectoral and territorial policies is important to maximize synergies and avoid possible conflicts (Mikuš et al., 2019, Colomb & Santinha, 2014; Doucet, 2006). For example, transport policy influences the location of economic activity and settlement patterns and plays an important role in improving connections to and within less developed regions. The Common Agricultural Policy and the support it provides to farmers also have important territorial impacts by maintaining activity and income in rural areas and promoting sound land management. Competitiveness policy can also have an impact on the territorial distribution of economic activity by ensuring that regional aid is concentrated in the most disadvantaged areas and by adapting the allowable aid intensity to the nature and scale of the problems. Finally, any intervention on the issues mentioned here, both in terms of balanced development and sectoral and regional policies on the ground, cannot be carried out by a single Member State but must be coordinated and integrated by the EU through greater integration and cooperation in policy implementation. Again, action in this direction is justified in terms of policy effectiveness.

The concept of TC, as has been pointed out several times (Faludi, 2004), has no universally accepted definition. It, therefore, represents a rather vague objective of communitarian policy, which more than anything else describes the intention to address problems related to territory: In this respect, it can be confused with the dimension of economic and social cohesion, which even tends to coincide (EC and SC). Overall, then, territorial cohesion is an overarching concept that must be linked to the European model's own objectives, such as competitiveness and balanced development, which are not always easy to reconcile (Faludi, 2007). However, it can be said that the now formalized introduction of the territorial dimension in the field of

cohesion policy has arisen from a clear policy-making need. This was the need to address some critical aspects of the European spatial context that are still present at this point in time, even if they date back more than four decades. The territorial dimension is, therefore, crucial as it encompasses all relevant strengths and weaknesses that the other two dimensions, namely EC and SC, cannot necessarily capture.

4. The need for a territorial dimension

The dimensions introduced and developed in the field of communitarian policies, which have not found their own space of discussion for the other European policies, have gradually diverged and created their own field of reflection. In particular, the need for a territorial dimension becomes more evident when dealing with a number of issues that are not necessarily addressed by European regional policies. This need refers to the partial coincidence of the three dimensions that could be solved within the framework of communitarian planning, which will be addressed in the next section. The aspect that needs to be underpinned is that, regardless of the possible reconstruction and deeper investigation of the links between the three dimensions (TC, EC, and SC), the territorial dimension can at least be highlighted as an "order of problems" in the development of the European spatial context, as the element of "territory" has undergone development and strengthening. Qualitatively, the territorial dimension has evolved and is now the third dimension necessary for achieving Cohesion, which is one of the ultimate goals of the EU. These aspects make the territorial dimension "necessary". In summary, this necessity is rooted in the willingness to address some issues that fall under the element of "territory": The crucial point is not the possible coercive process that allowed them to enter this field but the necessity for deliberation. The "Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion" has already been conceived to clarify the issues that need to be addressed in Europe: the still unclear determination of the element of "territory".

The "territory" element is an instrument to address a certain "order of problems" and possibilities in the European space: The need to introduce the territorial dimension derives from the willingness to face it. In other words, we could say that the need to introduce and formalize a territorial dimension, given the fact that good will is not enough to successfully face a problem, but that some conditions are also needed, can also be elaborated by analyzing the question in terms of Communitarian Planning, which strives to create the conditions for public intervention. This point can be better understood by starting from the criticism that has been made of the actual need to introduce the TC concept or, more precisely, of the degree to which the three dimensions are mixed. This criticism is essentially based on the observation that this concept is already implicit in EC and SC, so it is not new and therefore unnecessary: in fact, TC does not seem to be very different from its "brothers" EC or SC in its minimal definition or in its possible extensions, so there was no scope for introducing it in the New Treaty. Undoubtedly, the question is not one of the easiest to resolve, as the three dimensions seem to be inextricably linked from the perspective of modern regional economics.

However, the authors believe that the issue needs to be further examined from an appropriate problematic point of view, i.e., from a planning point of view, assessing not only and, above all, the full correspondence of the three dimensions, but also the actual "possibility" for Regional Policy to solve some critical problems of the European space without losing new instruments and schemes for the operation of public intervention. To illustrate this point, we can recall how the territorial dimension has already been elicited in planning in the past, which makes the hypothesis plausible to include it in the other dimensions or, in any case, to recall it through them. The EU, within the framework of political competence in the territorial field to which it has never been empowered, has always been attentive to this inseparability, considering the territorial dimension as a direct object of economic policy through the activation of specific programs also aimed at solving typical TC issues, or as an indirect object of European economic policy, with a two-way relationship between sectoral

policies and the urban and territorial context, with a mutual exchange of advantages and disadvantages. In most cases, this exchange can be expressed in the invitation to the territory to undergo such interventions, which raises the question of evaluating the territorial impact of some policies activated with the aim of economic and social cohesion.

Technically, this strategy seems to have been made possible by the superimposition of this concept on the other two dimensions, which allowed policymakers to direct the Structural Funds precisely towards this territorial order of the problems now included in the TC concept. So, this seems to confirm the hypothesis of redundancy of this concept with EC and SC. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this discrepancy can be resolved from the perspective of regional policy, which also allows us to determine the limits within which the non-necessity of introducing this concept should be supported.

Returning to the question of novelty, this would then refer, as illustrated by the aforementioned comments, to the degree to which the concept TC is mixed with EC and SC and to the fact that it would already be included in the others. In other words, this would mean that in order to obtain EC and SC, one must also consider TC, which would be a necessary condition for pursuing the other dimensions.

This question should be deepened by observing that TC is also only one of the possible solutions to preserve EC and SC, leaving room for other solutions strictly linked only to the latter two dimensions in order to preserve the general priority of Cohesion and how TC would also extend beyond the economic and social dimensions, obtaining, therefore, the incomplete correspondence between the terms: this becomes clear when referring to the variable "GDP per capita" and noting that even if there is a certain degree of cohesion in terms of "product per capita", there are still problems in terms of distributive equity, or sustainability, as the objectives of EC and SC can be achieved even if these aspects are neglected. It follows that the transition between "non-novelty" and "non-necessity" is not so immediate, and this question can be addressed from a Regional Planning perspective, which reminds us that "necessity", which in our case refers to the TC concept, is fundamentally determined by the "possibility" of effectively pursuing the types of problems raised and delimited within CT in terms of "planning". As a result, its introduction would be necessary not only to ensure the implementation of all that is required in relation to EC and SC but also for the existing possibility that planning, even if aimed at the Cohesion between the Member States, is directed towards other possible solutions that are closer to the content of EC and SC and independent of TC.

Returning to the question of the distribution of GDP per capita, we can see, for example, that cohesion is focused on the economic dimension but not on the spatial dimension. This proves that the three dimensions, although closely linked, do not necessarily satisfy each other and, as in the past, only the introduction and formalization of the TC concept can make it possible today to invest the Structural Funds with greater certainty in this complementary direction as well and to solve the problem of "balanced development" mentioned earlier.

To sum up, even if we accept the hypothesis that the TC concept is redundant with the EC and SC, starting from the assumption of the inseparability of the link between them because one gives rise to the other, it is also true that, even if we start from the point of view of Regional Planning, these links must find the guarantee to be transformed into objectives and then into programs, a guarantee that can only derive from making TC and, in general, the territorial dimension a priority. This is true because the problem is not so much the degree of mixing between the three dimensions, but the actual possibility for the political decision-maker to intervene, and this possibility derives from a clear inclusion of the "territory" element in the Union's cardinal objectives. This clear and explicit inclusion of the TC concept in the Treaties is a constraint for Community planning since specific territorial problems would have to be dealt with in the future, informing each member of the Union of the direction of policy in the coming period.

5. The territorial dimension, governance and tourism

5.1. Governance issues

Returning to the order of problems and potentials that can be introduced and formalized, the necessity for a territorial dimension has also been demonstrated as a function of the adoption of new schemes and modes for the implementation of the regional policy itself. The main point is that the implementation of policies must be formulated with the awareness that every public intervention is designed to act on a specific territory or at several territories at the same time and, therefore, in order to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to take into account the specific mechanisms and codes through which policies are channeled. The introduction of the territorial dimension is considered necessary to cover the aspects of regional policy that might otherwise be neglected by the other two dimensions. The Union's territorial policy would thus not be exclusively focused on solving specific issues, such as spatial problems or those concerning equity and the effectiveness of structural policies (with the aim of making the territory the subject of the policy). Another objective would then also be the introduction of specific methods for the implementation of public policies, conceived through the territory and able to consider the specific characteristics of the places and codes through which "everything" is channeled and consequently public intervention (now envisaging the territory as a mean of implementing the policy). There thus seems to be a discernible boundary between the need for a territorial dimension associated with the will to solve a specific order of problems (spatial, concerning disparity, planning, etc.) and the same need associated instead with the need to introduce schemes and modes for the implementation of public policies conceived and tested around the theme of "territory".

These policies have indeed helped to confirm the transition from "government" to "governance", focusing on its dependence on the system of codes and intrinsic spatial relations, through a complete revision of the models of action of territorial policies, from one vision based on a "plan for the territory" to another based on an "agreement or pact for the territory".

From this point of view, the territory is no longer the object of politics but the way in which policy is implemented, prescribing new schemes and modalities for its implementation. The resulting need for a territorial dimension is now also evident in its function of promoting and implementing appropriate models of governance. As can be seen from the document "European Governance. A White Paper", the Union has continuously based its policies on the concept of governance, but at the same time, claims the need for its improvement. In particular, it seeks "better involvement and more openness by establishing a more systematic dialogue with representatives of regional and local governments, through national and European associations at an early stage in shaping policy".

TC seems to be the answer to these points because, as the "Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion" points out, transforming "territorial diversity into strength", will improve the "governance of cohesion policy, making it more flexible, more capable of adapting to the most appropriate territorial scale, more responsive to local preferences and needs and better coordinated with other policies, at all levels in conformity with the principle of subsidiarity".

From the experience of programs and projects (Urban and Interreg in particular), at least two reflections can be drawn on the definition of schemes and modalities for the implementation of public policies, highlighting the link between the territorial dimension, intended as a relational space and the implementation of public policies. First, the need for a model that not only sets some objectives but is also able to encourage the stakeholders towards these objectives: establishing a plan for economic and social development and pursuing objectives of cohesion, equity and efficiency would mean engaging in a dialogue with various public and private actors. The efficiency of public action depends on the extent to which the policymaker is able to involve the different parts, i.e., the individual territory and the territories among themselves. Secondly, unlike

government, governance not only allows for an immediate reversal of the order of decision-making from a top-down to a bottom-up approach but also clarifies the importance of relationships and, in particular, territorial relationships, both explicit and codified.

In this sense, in recent years, the EU has embarked on a process of recognizing regional and local authorities as essential actors in the implementation of EU Regional Policy: the subsidiarity principle and the establishment of representative bodies of local communities go in this direction. This is only possible through a more inclusive design that meets the needs of local decision-makers to work simultaneously with the social and economic groups and the local communities concerned. The partnership principle is closely related to the subsidiarity principle, which states that decisions should be taken at the level that is most able to implement them within a broader cooperation network that can pool resources and experience.

The involvement of regional and local authorities helps to legitimize the decision-making process by counterbalancing specific political or other influences. Regional and local authorities, socio-economic partners, and civil society (the territory) can also contribute to the transparency of decisions and decision-making processes through their participation and the exchange of information. These schemes and modalities, which run parallel to the other elements of the third dimension, have already been the subject of previous planning, but with the same parallelism, as the two categories of necessities outlined so far now need to be made explicit and formalized so that they can be used more securely: the vagueness of the third dimension, especially territorial cohesion, also enables this "passage" and the formalization of the territorial dimension is the guarantee that this process really takes place.

5.2. The territorial dimension in EU tourism policies and research

Although scholars and policymakers have recognized the importance of tourism for regional development and growth, tourism has emerged as a significant and distinct sector since the early 1990s. However, despite theoretical and empirical developments, tourism research as a regional study is still in its infancy (Calero & Turner, 2019). The literature on tourism as a factor in regional economic development is very limited, with most work focusing on case studies, surveys, and descriptive analysis in general. Research on tourism and regional development focuses mainly on the role of tourism in regional development and whether it leads to growth and informs policymakers to reduce regional disparities. (Vu & Turner, 2006; Zhou-Grundy & Turner, 2014). Tourism is an important driver of regional development, but there is little theoretical work that attempts to explain the link between regional development and tourism. Most major research on tourism in regional development has not considered the spatial context, relying only on aggregates such as demand and supply, i.e., macroeconomic theories of consumer choice and the utility theory of choice. (Calero and Turner, 2019). It could be argued that tourism and the spatial dimension is a topic in research that needs to be further developed and explored. In EU policies, in particular concerning the Cohesion Policy, tourism is not mentioned as a driver of territorial cohesion but only as a factor of economic growth and social development. In general, tourism and the territorial dimension in EU cohesion policy are hardly discussed in the literature, although it actually contributes to achieving the objectives of cohesion policy.

For many years, the tourism sector has been carrying out various actions to strengthen tourism at the European level and improve its competitiveness. Over the years, the European Union has managed and has the mandate to develop a European tourism policy, recognizing the importance of this strategic sector within the EU economy. The European tourism policy results from the standardization of already existing practices or policies belonging to other sectors such as environment, cultural and/or accessible tourism, transport, agriculture, etc. It supports the creation of a single European market and promotes the integration of the tourism policies of the individual Member States. EU tourism policy has led to a progressive legitimization of the EU institution, in particular through the allocation of funds for tourism under the umbrella of regional

development. This has subsequently weakened the autonomy of Member States in formulating tourism policy, which must ratify EU policy and transpose it into their national and regional legislation in order to benefit from EU funds. *Europe, favorite worldwide tourist destination - a new political framework for European tourism, Brussels, 2010* promotes the sustainable and harmonious development of tourism in EU Member countries. In general, it promotes win-win and coordinated approaches to tourism-related initiatives for national governments and tourism stakeholders and fosters new frameworks of action to improve the sector's competitiveness and sustainable growth in all EU Member States.

Tourism not only contributes to economic growth but also represents an additional resource, as it has a strong influence on production in other domains of activity (Soare et al., 2019). On the one hand, tourism causes the emergence of activities closely related to it, such as the leisure industry, hospitality, transport, travel agencies and tour operators, local handcraft production and, on the other hand, it fosters the development of new dimensions of existing industries and services: agriculture, food industry, construction, transport, cultural services.

Moreover, tourism is capable of exploiting many categories of resources (natural, cultural, gastronomic, artistic, and traditional events, etc.), the use of which leads to an increase in GDP, makes an important contribution to value creation and, compared to other economic sectors, can be an important driver of the local economy, especially in disadvantaged regions. Based on these effects, we can claim that tourism can bring about territorial transformations and mitigate interregional disparities by bringing prosperity to peripheral, rural, or post-industrial regions. Thus, the impulse of tourism can promote and support territorial cohesion and reduce economic and social polarisation between regions. For instance, the territorial cohesion policies based on tourism development implemented by the Province of Trentino and the Italian North Coast is a successful case of how tourism acts as a driver for regional and local development and consequently contribute to territorial cohesion (Battilani & Strangio, 2020).

For this reason, in the Agenda 21 of May 2002, the European Union Council recognized the need to better coordinate tourism policies and to make tourism an important element of territorial cohesion. Indeed, tourism contributes to the concept of territorial cohesion as a political objective at the European level by exploiting territorial potential, using geographical features for territorial development, linking cities and territories, and establishing real cooperation between different sectors.

Achieving greater territorial cohesion between regions through political discussion and the reorganization of regional and local structures in perfect vertical linkage down to the local level and with the private sector is also promoted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) so that the tourism sector can develop its role in strengthening economic and social activities and territorial equity. However, as it is common knowledge that implementing comprehensive policies in an inter-municipal and inter-regional vision is a hard task, it seems necessary *"to find for new ways of territorial cooperation and improve the coordination among regional policies, in order to confirm the relevance of the territory in this actual economic framework, which is global and interdependent and where the competitiveness is based on the creation of links with other territories to use common resources in a coordinated and sustainable way"* (Serdoura et al., 2009).

With the aim of strengthening regional development and territorial cohesion through territorial cooperation, the European Union has established four macro-regions comprising 27 countries (both EU and the non-EU Member States):

- Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR);
- Danube Region (EUSDR);
- Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR);
- Alpine Region (EUSALP).

Macro-regions are based on geographical and cultural commonalities of territories and represent an innovative approach to European integration and cross-border cooperation to achieve greater territorial cohesion and common strategies. Indeed, transnational programs support cooperation by bringing together actors from similar territories to jointly address their common challenges and opportunities. Cooperation between territories of the same macro-region leads to the exchange of knowledge and experience, good and bad practices, and strengthens social cohesion and a sense of ownership. Macro-regional and EU cooperation supports and strengthens cohesion through:

- Reducing inequality by triggering investment;
- Strengthening macro-regional strategies;
- Promoting and encouraging territorial cohesion;
- Improving and enhancing the use of limited resources;
- Addressing and tackling challenges beyond national borders;
- Supporting authorities to improve services and local policies;
- Creating lasting change.

5.3. EU programs and the role of tourism in EU territorial cohesion: The case of European Cultural Routes

Cooperation between countries is crucial for promoting and fostering territorial cohesion. Thus, transnational and interterritorial cooperation improve territorial competitiveness and minimize social and economic fragmentation by sharing benefits between territories (Committee of the Regions, 2006). The need to consider cooperation in a broader geographical sense is particularly important for natural and cultural heritage, as ecosystems and historical heritage do not recognize political or administrative borders. The European Union has several programs and initiatives that contribute to the development of rural tourism. These are Cultural Routes, EuroVelo, and EDEN destinations. The case of the European Cultural Routes is considered here.

According to the Council of Europe (2010) *in Cultural tourism in the EU macro-regions: Cultural Routes to increase the attractiveness of remote destinations*, tourism plays a key role in regional development and transnational cooperation in this framework. The promotion of sustainable and innovative tourism products and services at cross-border and transnational levels helps to profile a region as a destination in key source markets by emphasizing the common identity of the region through a shared cultural and natural heritage.

The Cultural Routes is a program launched by the Council of Europe in 1987 with the *Declaration of Santiago de Compostela*. It rewards cross-border routes that promote European culture, history, and memory and put into practice the Council of Europe values of cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and mutual exchange across borders. The Council of Europe's Cultural Route label is a certificate of excellence, and it currently includes 45 routes across Europe. This program provides a model for transnational cultural and tourism management that encourages and supports the development of synergies between national, regional, and local authorities and socio-economic actors (Routes4U Project, 2020).

Originally, the main aim of European routes was to promote European identity. More recently, since tourism has been included among the objectives of Community policy (Lisbon Treaty, 2009), one of the main aims of the program is to promote the lesser-known cultural and natural heritage as an important factor in the development of marginal and rural areas, in order to improve the local quality of life and promote sustainable development. Indeed, the Cultural Routes play an important role in achieving sustainable and inclusive growth and aim to improve territorial cohesion in Europe through the creation of tourist-cultural routes that bring economic benefits to local communities and improve social cohesion. The program strengthens cooperation at

the European, national, regional and local level and offers regional and local actors that are part of a Cultural Route significant potential for developing synergies and initiatives with international partners and supranational bodies such as other Routes established with European Union funding or the UNESCO awarded European sites. Interregional cooperation can contribute to the improvement and creation of strategies that promote territorial cohesion between territories belonging to the same Cultural Route by facilitating the exchange of good practices and knowledge on important issues related to the sustainable development of territories, the management of a common heritage, etc. Cultural Routes can also make an important contribution to local economies and communities, as they often publicize lesser-known destinations and promote capacity-building activities. For instance, 90% of cultural routes involve rural areas, and the identification of good practices can serve as inspiration for the promotion and valorization of villages, heritage, and sustainable tourism in peripheral areas.

Finally, we can argue that transnational Cultural Routes represent a huge potential for business creation, contribution to local economies, intercultural dialogue, and territorial cohesion, as well as for promoting Europe's image and values, as also shown in the document *Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness* (Council of Europe, 2010).

6. Final considerations

Based on an analysis of the needs that have led to the introduction of a territorial dimension in European policies, it can be deduced that there has been a general increase in sensitivity to some issues that are difficult to deal with, such as the spatial organization of economic development or the effectiveness of structural policies. The territorial dimension brings forth problems, especially in terms of planning, new schemes and the way public policies are conducted. The following priorities can be derived from the reflections made in this work: the first one goes back to the willingness of the communitarian organisms to look at the economic development of Europe from a new perspective, namely the territorial one, with the fundamental aim of grasping the problems and reasons for criticality that affect the European space today, also through the new concept TC (the need arises from the "individuation of territorial problems in Europe"); a second one related to the issue of communitarian planning, which is easy to understand when dealing with the previous category, especially the mixing of the territorial dimension with the economic and social one. It forces the communitarian decision-maker to give priority to the territory and a clear "signal" for communitarian policies (the "necessity" stems from the need to create "the conditions for solving the problems" in operational terms); a third, which can be equated with the need to deal with some issues that are not directly related to the territorial issues themselves, but rather to the implementation of regional policies itself, or even with the need to adopt new schemes and ways of functioning of municipal policies (the "necessity" stems from the question of "how policies can be operated").

Returning to the question raised for the second category, it can be stated that all these requirements, in any case, serve the aim of Community policymakers to send a clear and reliable signal to the policy-political decision-makers of the individual Member States, informing them that Community policies, and thus also the allocation of Structural Funds will be geared to the territorial dimension and informing them that, on the basis of the single regional policy, all internal planning must be geared to it.

In general, then, the successful introduction of the territorial dimension depends on the extent to which the local decision-maker would make this signal clear (i.e., unambiguously legible) and credible (i.e., feasible). In practice, this would mean that, depending on the extent to which the objective of territorial cohesion is defined and established today, any policy in the future would at least have to:

- orient and direct Community policies as well as the policies of individual Member States towards increasingly and progressively more specific ordering of the problems in the space of European development;

- introduce and make better use of new schemes, modes, and methods of operation for the given public policies.

The European Commission's Seventh Report on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion 2017 addresses, in terms of territorial cohesion, the main challenges for the development of EU regions, which are mainly environmental. The report also states that future funding for cross-border cooperation should continue to focus on areas of particular added value for the EU and address cross-border problems such as gaps and missing links in different policy areas. Tourism should play an important role in the package of European policies and future funding to achieve territorial cohesion, given its added value and proven importance in promoting territorial cohesion. This could also play a central role and be further developed in the context of the measures to address the Covid-19 crisis and, in particular, the measures under the interim economic recovery plan NextGenerationEU, which unsurprisingly provides incentives for European cohesion and territories (REACT -EU), as well as the objectives of the European Green Deal (COM 2019/640). Much remains to be done to recognize the key role of tourism as an instrument of territorial cohesion and to give it the place it deserves in European cohesion policy.

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