

Integrative Mechanisms for Addressing Spatial Justice and Territorial Inequalities in Europe

D8.2 Policy Report on the Relational Qualities of Spatial Justice

Version 2

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Grant Agreement No.:	726950
Programme call:	H2020-SC6-REV-INEQUAL-2016-2017
Type of action:	RIA – Research & Innovation Action
Project Start Date:	01-01-2017
Duration:	60 months
Deliverable Lead Beneficiary:	NUI Galway
Dissemination Level:	Public
Contact of responsible author:	marie.mahon@nuigalway.ie

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 726950.

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Dissemination level:

- PU = Public
- CO = Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)

Change control

VERSION	DATE	AUTHOR	ORGANISATION	DESCRIPTION / COMMENTS
1.0		Cormac Walsh	NUIG	First full draft of D8.2
		Brendan O'Keeffe	NUIG	
		Marie Mahon	NUIG	
2.0		Cormac Walsh	NUIG	Second full draft of 8.2
		Brendan O'Keeffe	NUIG	
		Marie Mahon	NUIG	

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CEC	Commission of the European Communities
DHPLG	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (Ireland)
ESPON	European Spatial Planning Observatory Network
FMIBC	Federal Ministry for the Interior, Building and Community
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
JTM	Just Transition Mechanism
NCP	Nature's Contribution to People (approach to biodiversity conservation)
TAEU	Territorial Agenda of the European Union

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1. Introduction: Spatial Justice in Europe

Economic inequality has risen in Europe over the last three decades. The financial crisis, beginning in 2008, has served to further accentuate and raise awareness of the extent of inequality both among and within EU member states (Papadopolous 2019¹). In particular, concerns have risen that economic inequality has reached levels which may undermine democracy and contribute to an evident rise in right-wing populist politics (Rodrik 2018). Critical moments of crisis in Europe include the Greek Euro-crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, the exit of the UK from the EU and the response to the current Covid-19. These have demonstrated the fragility and vulnerability of European solidarity in the face of external shocks. It is against this background that the concept of spatial justice gains new salience as an expression of multifaceted concerns pertaining to the adverse effects of inequalities in living standards and opportunities among European citizens, social groups, regions and countries (Jones et al 2019, 115).

The concept of spatial justice is fundamentally normative. It is defined variously according to scientific analysis, ethical concerns, political programmes and activist standpoints. Furthermore, it is a concept with both an abstract, universal dimension and a practical embedding in specific geographical, societal and historical contexts (D 1.1., 6, Jones et al 2019, 113). It is, consequently, a contested concept. Perhaps, the most well-known theory of justice is that of philosopher John Rawls, who argued that if people were to develop principles of a just society with no knowledge of their own position within that society, they would seek to arrange social and economic opportunities to the “greatest benefit of the least advantaged” (Rawls 1971 10ff.). Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen, in contrast, places greater emphasis on freedom, liberty, individual choices and the capacity of individuals to develop their capabilities (Sen 1993, D1.1). Translated into the political sphere, a Rawlsian perspective would call for a progressive redistribution of income and wealth, supported by a strong social welfare state. In contrast, Sen’s ideas of justice and freedom are aligned with a liberal model of the state, focussed on the maximisation of opportunities at the level of the individual. Principles of redistributive and rights-based social justice are encapsulated within the European Social Charter (agreed in 1961 and amended in 1996) and the concept of a ‘social Europe’, both of which draw on the European post-war welfare state model (Rifkin, 2004). The societal narrative of the ‘American Dream’, on the other hand, is perhaps the most prominent popular expression of a model of society oriented towards individual achievement in a ‘land of opportunities’.

¹ The publications Papadopolous 2019 and Jones et al 2019 are outputs of IMAJINE research.

Socio-economic rights are better protected in Europe than almost anywhere else in the world. In general, European citizens enjoy access to comparatively high levels of health care and social security, and strong trade unions ensure labour rights are protected through legislation. Indeed, a state responsibility for the economic and social well-being of citizens has deep roots in European legal and political culture (O' Cinneide 2014, 169). The European welfare state, itself, was based around the concept of 'social citizenship', attributed to T.H. Marshall (Marshall 1992). The notion of a social Europe, which features strongly in EU policy rhetoric may be interpreted as a commitment to upholding the principles of the European social model, and implies the existence of shared European social values. Critical commentators, however, point to a widening gap between the rhetoric of a social Europe and the reality of a shift towards a neoliberal 'hollowing-out' of state, accompanied by an increased emphasis on fiscal discipline and a politics of austerity (e.g. O' Cinneide 2014). In practice, it is possible to point to a plurality of welfare state models in Europe, reflecting differing ideas of social solidarity and social justice, belying the notion of a singular European social model (di Napoli & Russo 2018²). The values of freedom, justice, equality and social justice remain, nevertheless, enshrined within the formal objectives of the European Union as set out in Articles 2 of the Treaty on European Union:

“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society where pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail” (TEU Art. 2).

Article 3 more specifically addresses relations between Member States, declaring that the EU **“shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States”** (TEU Art. 3).

In the following, we are concerned with the spatial dimensions of justice in Europe. Our concern goes beyond the question of solidarity or cohesion between Member States, to more fundamentally address the relevance of geography (or, in other words, social relations across space) to a discussion of social justice in Europe. Human geographers and planning scholars are among those who have more explicitly considered the spatial dimension of social justice. Dabinett (2010, 2391) for example, warns against a conceptualisation of spatial justice as “shorthand for social justice in space”. Rather than geography providing a backdrop, relations across space are considered integral to any understanding

² Referenced here (di Napoli & Russo 2018) are research results from the Horizon 2020 TransSOL project: *European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis: Conditions, forms, role-models and policy responses*. See also Lahusen & Grasso (2018).

of spatial justice. This perspective notes the significance of processes of uneven urban and regional development under capitalism (e.g. Smith 1984) and the relational character of space, as discussed below.

The concepts of territorial cohesion and solidarity (among social groups and Member States) provide the foundational building blocks for a relational conceptualisation of spatial justice in the context of the European Union. A progressive discourse on spatial justice requires attention to both the functional relationships between urban and rural, core and periphery, prosperous and disadvantaged regions and the social and political relations of cohesion and solidarity with the capacity to bind places and places together (see Jones et al 2019).

The purpose of this policy report is to identify and discuss the relational qualities of spatial justice within the context of EU policy-making. This discussion is intended to provide the basis for the development of scenarios or storylines concerning possible and plausible future trajectories of spatial justice (and injustice), in Europe, and associated policy responses. The remainder of this policy report is structured as follows: Sections 2 and 3 (below) introduce relational space and relational values and their implications for how we understand spatial justice in Europe. In Section 4, we focus more specifically on the relationship between spatial justice and territorial cohesion policy. Section 5 subsequently draws out key relational qualities for a progressive, solidarity-based reformulation of spatial justice in Europe. Section 6 provides a brief summary and concluding comments.

2. Why Relational Space?

In broad terms, relational thinking implies paying closer attention to relationships between objects than to the attributes of the objects themselves. This implies that inequality of opportunities across Europe should not be considered as primarily the outcome of processes and structures located within particular regions, but rather as the product of dynamic relationships at the inter-regional level. In the last ten years, relational perspectives have become increasingly prominent in policy-making, particularly in the fields of rural development policy (Woods & McDonagh 2011, Copus & DeLima 2014) and nature conservation (Chan et al. 2016). Within the rural development policy field, analysis of the opportunities and challenges afforded by social and economic globalisation led researchers to revisit previous models of urban-rural and core-periphery relations. The term *relational space* is applied to express these changing relationships across space:

Relational space: A term which conveys the idea that increasingly it is the strength of relationship, and the degree of common interest, which determines the value of a link

in a network, rather than the geographical distance between the nodes. (Copus 2011, ESPON EDORA final report, nonpaginated).

Research conducted under the ESPON EDORA (European Development Opportunities in Rural Areas) project in particular, highlighted the need to explicitly address the multidimensionality of geographical relations relevant to rural areas in Europe, challenging stereotypical perceptions of the rural as marginal, peripheral or intrinsically disadvantaged. This research drew attention to the importance of relationships between rural areas (*rural-rural*) and between rural areas and global processes or networks (*rural-global*) in addition to urban-rural and urban-global relations. Landscape architect Thomas Sieverts (1997/2003) similarly advanced an understanding of peri-urban areas as relational ‘in-between-spaces’, located between “place and world, space and time, city and country” (2003, x). Significantly, this in-between positioning is understood not only in the material, spatial terms of a physical location, between urban and rural, but in discursive and conceptual terms. He recognised the contested nature of peri-urban spaces, as the emergent and fluid product of multiple divergent narratives and practices transgressing fundamental categories of local and global, place and space, past, present and future.

This perspective is of central relevance to our consideration of the relational qualities of spatial justice. The idea that space is not absolute, but relational, may be traced to the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, who stated that “spatial properties are relational, and the position of any object is to be given in terms of its relation to any other objects” (in Scruton 1996, 362). Thinking in terms of relational space, thus, implies a foregrounding of functional connectivities across space rather than the hard and fixed spatial boundaries characteristic of a political map of the world. In place of a *metageography* of Europe as a mosaic of self-contained nation-states, relational thinking invites consideration of European space as a fluid space of transboundary connections. Rather than seeking to control and manage complex socio-spatial relations within pre-defined political-administrative boundaries, relational planning aims to recognise such complexities and the opportunities arising from them (Davoudi 2013, Walsh 2020).

Viewed from a relational perspective, it is evident, that the geographical boundaries of social groups, cultural identities, landscapes and ecosystems within Europe, more often than not, do not correspond to the neat territorial containers of the nation-state (Faludi 2018). Despite decades of European integration, nation-states have nevertheless continued to represent the ‘most important internal spaces’ of the EU (Murphy, 2008, 9). This persistent state-centric metageographical understanding of Europe limits the range of competences that apply at the European level, and also inhibit the scope

for multi-level and transboundary governance. Indeed, the recent history of European integration be interpreted in terms of a series of concerted, if partial, efforts to frame European space in non-state-centric terms - to replace the map of a Europe of nation-states with that of Europe as a coherent, functional space where political borders are of secondary importance (Walsh 2019). The concept of a 'Europe of the regions' featured prominently in debates on European integration in the 1990s, signifying a shift towards sub-national regions as the core units of economic development and governance in Europe. At a higher policy level, the Europe 2000+ report of the European Commission explicitly adopted functional rather than administrative regions as the focus of analysis. The rationale for this was articulated in terms of an explicit desire to reframe European space in functional, non-territorial terms: to 'encourage new ways of thinking about spatial prospects which is not limited by national boundaries' (Commission of the European Communities, 1994, 169). The report stressed that the particular functional regions identified were only one possible division of the European territory, and were not intended to provide a basis for future policy action. The intention was not to create new territorial spaces or 'European super regions', but to identify functional linkages across territorial boundaries. Subsequent European spatial planning policy initiatives have maintained this explicit focus on functional spaces, as evidenced, for example, by the prominence of the spatial concepts of polycentric regions and urban-rural relations in the European Spatial Development Perspective (CEC 1999). Ideas of relational space have furthermore become incorporated within spatial plans at multiple scales, from the macro-regional to the local, over the past two decades. The maps reproduced below (Figure 1), prepared for the recently published *Atlas for the Territorial Agenda 2030* (FMIBC et al 2020) are one example of an explicitly relational perspective on the European territory, emphasising relations of connectivity across space. The maps indicate the intensity and direction of migration flows both within Europe and between European countries and other world regions. It may be noted, however, that the nation-state is, in this case, retained as the primary unit of analysis.

Explicit, transboundary spatial perspectives are furthermore found within European environmental policy frameworks, from the Habitats Directive (biogeographical regions) to the Water Framework Directive (international river basin districts). The most significant and far-reaching expression of a European space of functional relations is, however, found in the principles of free movement of capital, goods, labour and services (the so-called four freedoms) underpinning the European Single Market. Despite this attention to relational space in European policy, however, many areas of decision-making within the EU continue to be strongly influenced by national interests and state-centric perspectives (see Faludi 2018). One example of a narrow state-centric approach is the Dublin Regulation, which determines which Member State is responsible for the assessment of applications for asylum within the EU territory. Member states' variable responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and

the tardiness in engendering a collaborative EU-wide response to public health (as described by Maor and Moshe, 2020) further illustrate the persistence of the predominance of national governments in EU decision-making structures and processes. Moreover, the European Commission’s proposal for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), post 2020, transfer decision-making competencies from the centre to the member states, and have been critiqued for giving member states too much flexibility, particularly in respect of environmental targets (Pe’er et al. 2020). This is significant given the overall size of the CAP budget and its long-highlighted shortcomings in terms of spatial justice and contradictions with elements of EU regional policy (ESPON 2003).

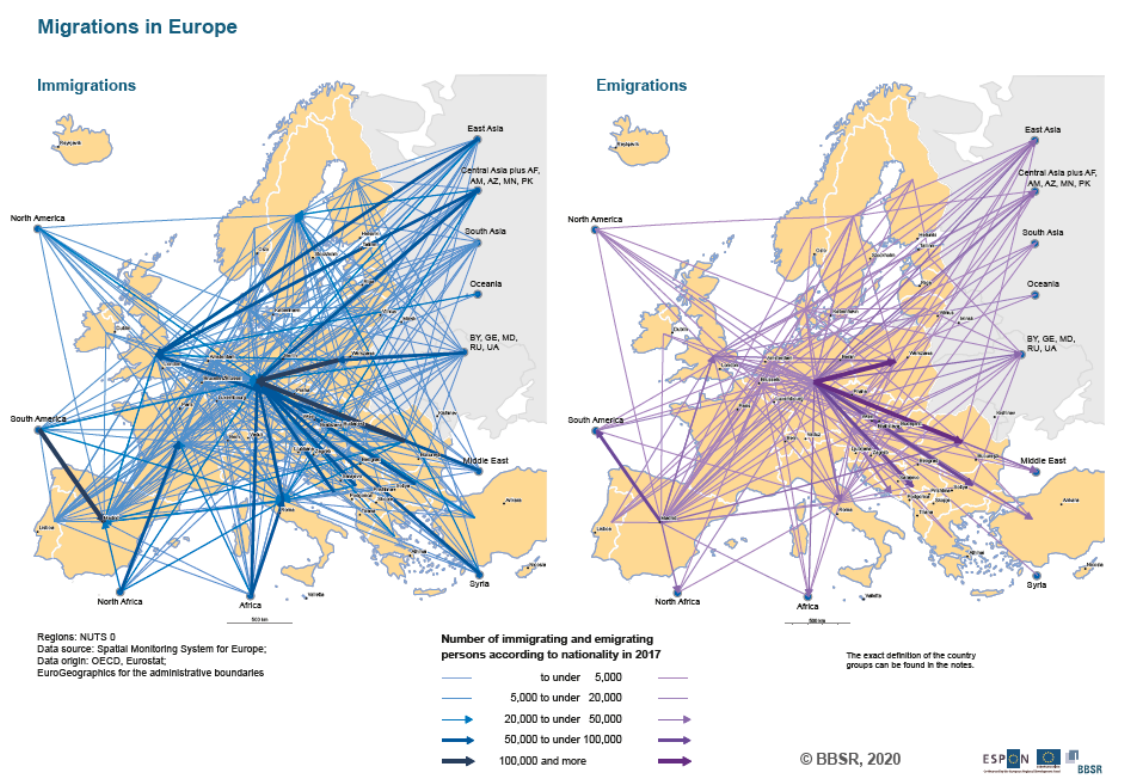


Figure 1: Migration flows to and from European countries (source: FMIBC et al 2020).

3. Relational Values: Solidarity in Europe

The concept of *relational values*, on the other hand, has emerged within the academic and policy literature on nature conservation. Here, relational values are understood to derive from the relationships between people and the environment (e.g. Chan et al 2016). The intergovernmental science-policy platform on the biodiversity and ecosystem services (IPBES) has provided a forum for discussion on relational values, which have informed the elaboration of the ‘Nature’s Contribution to

People' (NCP) approach to biodiversity conservation (Stenseke 2018, 82). In seeking an answer to the question of why people care for nature and the environment, researchers and policy-makers sought to find a third way between intrinsic and instrumental perspectives on valuation. *Intrinsic value* implies nature should be protected for its own sake or for its inherent worth. *Instrumental value* assumes the satisfaction of particular preferences, and focuses on use-values. In contrast, *relational values* are founded on concepts of 'the good life' and a sense of care, responsibility or justice:

Relational values are not present in things but derivative of relationships and responsibilities to them... An individual preference or societal choice can be questioned or reframed based on its consistency with core values, such as justice, care, virtue, and reciprocity (Chan et al 2016, 1462).

Returning to the question of spatial justice in Europe, it may be argued that calls to reduce disparities between regions, countries and/or social groups in Europe have been informed by both instrumental and relational values. Higher levels of social and economic cohesion are understood to lead to greater efficiency and to benefit wealthier as well as poorer regions (see also IMAJINE D1.2, D1.4). The notion of relational values finds its most clear expression in the concept of solidarity. As a social principle, solidarity implies an awareness of shared interests, objectives, and/or sympathies, creating a sense of internal unity of social groups or classes (Merriam Webster). Solidarity among European Member States is commonly understood in terms of sharing both the advantages and responsibilities of EU membership, as the following definition suggests:

The principle of solidarity of the European Union is a fundamental principle based on sharing both the advantages, i.e. prosperity, and the burdens equally and justly among members (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011³).

Solidarity among Member States is foundational to the concepts of social, economic and territorial cohesion. Solidarity, in this context, implies a sense of shared common good at the European scale, above and beyond the national interests of Member States. The political concept of solidarity may be traced to the French Revolution and the concept of fraternity (Habermas 2013, Faludi 2018). The concept of the nation has long been associated with communities of solidarity, particularly within the civic nationalism scholarly tradition (e.g. Renan 1882). More recently, it has been argued that the territoriality of the nation-state provides the frame for a social contract, for an 'imagined community'

³ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary/solidarity-principle#:~:text=The%20principle%20of%20solidarity%20of,the%20context%20of%20social%20protection.>

of citizens united by common cultural values, and history (Anderson 1983, also Elden 2013). From this perspective, solidarity is fundamentally a territorial concept. Yet, solidarity is also intrinsically a relational concept, underpinned by relations of identity and belonging among and between individuals. Distinguishing solidarity conceptually from charitable help or humanitarian aid, it may be argued that solidarity requires group membership with an expectation of mutual support. Solidarity, from this perspective, may be defined in terms of “the preparedness to share one’s own resources with others” whether through informal or formal means (Stjerno 2012: 2, in Lahusen & Grasso 2018). It follows that the cultivation of a European public sphere and sense of community at the European scale are critically important for the fostering of relational solidarity and a sense of spatial justice within Europe. Previous studies have found that sixty years of European integration and cooperation have gradually established feelings of ‘belongingness’ to the European community, fostered European and cosmopolitan identities and enabled shared identification with European institutions (e.g. Delanty and Rumford 2005, Bardeli 2016). Through European integration, cross-national experiences, contact and knowledge exchange has occurred, thereby increasing a sense of trust and familiarity across borders in Europe (Delhey 2007, Lahusen & Grasso 2018). The development of a European, transnational public sphere is, however, a challenging task, given the continued dominance of the nation-state as the primary frame of reference. Broadcast and print news media in Europe, for example, continue, with few exceptions, to be embedded within national structures. The global and transnational character of much of what becomes ‘news’ notwithstanding, the selection, interpretation, framing and commentary of such news items occurs within national contexts, for national publics (Flew et al. 2016). Against this background it, is perhaps not surprising that considerations of the public interest or the common good tend, also, to be framed in terms of the national interest.

Recent episodes of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic and refugee crisis and the rise of right-wing populism in Hungary, Poland and the UK, have tested the extent of solidarity among Member States (Lahusen & Grasso 2018). Following the economic and financial crisis of 2008/2009, and the imposition of austerity measures on countries threatened with bankruptcy, many commentators argued that international solidarity was dead (see Hadjimichaelis 2011, Habermas 2017). The exit of the UK from the European Union is furthermore viewed as a ‘paradigmatic example’ of a decline in solidarity between European countries. Although the UK were long regarded as ‘reluctant Europeans’, Brexit has nevertheless exposed the EU’s vulnerability to populist nationalism (Di Napoli & Russo, 2018). At the same time, however, the remaining EU-27 have, throughout the Brexit negotiations (2016-2020), demonstrated a very high degree of intra-European solidarity, particularly with the Republic of Ireland and the people of Northern Ireland, in relation to the ‘border question’ (e.g. Connelly 2017, Walsh

2019). Critical commentators suggest the need for a reconceptualization of solidarity beyond the nation-state, recognising that people increasingly live their lives within a complex web of transnational relations rather than nested hierarchies of local, regional, national and international (e.g. Amin 2004, Fraser 2007). Doreen Massey (1993, 2005) in particular, fostered a 'new progressive sense of place', an understanding of places, not as bounded locales but as constituted through flows, movements, linkages and interdependencies at multiple scales (also Kitchin 2016). From this perspective, places are simultaneously local and global, shaped through structural processes but, nevertheless, retaining their local particularities and character. Ash Amin (2004, 40) more explicitly set out the contours for a relational politics of place, drawing on a 'politics of connectivity', constituted through a pluralist public sphere. For him, a progressive politics of place, founded on intersecting relations of interaction, implied that the 'inside' and 'outside', or in other words, the boundary between 'us' and 'them' can no longer be defined in locational, territorial terms (ibid, 41). This nuanced, relational understanding of place is reflected, albeit to a limited extent, in the EU policy discourse on territorial diversity and place-based policy, discussed below.

In section 3) below, we elaborate on territorial cohesion as a policy concept and its relationship with spatial justice. Policy rationales for territorial cohesion are found to have shifted over time, to reflecting variously instrumental and relational values.

4. Spatial Justice and Territorial Cohesion Policy

Territorial cohesion is a principle policy concept in the context of the EU where the issue of spatial justice has been explicitly addressed. The European Commission regional policy glossary includes the following definition of territorial cohesion:

As an objective, territorial cohesion is all about ensuring that people are able to make the most of the inherent features of the areas in which they live. No European citizen should be disadvantaged in terms of access to public services, housing, or employment opportunities simply by living in one region rather than another. Territorial cohesion aims for more balanced and sustainable development (European Commission, online⁴).

This definition, references a number of distinct components, each of which feature prominently in discussions of territorial cohesion at EU level. The reference to the 'inherent features' of particular

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/glossary/t/territorial-cohesion

areas implies that the diverse physical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of European regions and cities (*territorial diversity*) present opportunities for place-based development. The notion of ‘inherent features’ however, belies the extent to which those features are not pre-determined but actively constituted through functional relations across space. The second sentence represents a comparatively strong normative statement of principled spatial justice, centred on the claim that individual citizens should not experience disadvantage due to their place of residence. Spatial justice is defined here in relatively narrow utilitarian terms, as a function of accessibility to services and markets. The third sentence implies the pursuit of this normative objective through more balanced and sustainable development, without prescribing what this may mean in practice. Territorial cohesion, as defined here, may be interpreted as a recognition of the fact that social and economic cohesion in Europe requires attention to the underlying geography of European regions and cities. It implies going beyond a concern for relations of inequality or solidarity between Member States, and between north and south, to consider social relations across space and the qualities that give individual cities and regions their distinctive identities (Delors, 2004). Whereas, cohesion policy in its early years sought to provide financial support for what were viewed as Europe’s ‘most backward regions’ by means of structural funds investment programmes, the rhetoric and policy have shifted substantially over time to the current situation whereby all regions may be potential beneficiaries of Cohesion Funds (see also D 1.2, Papadopolous 2019).

The concept of territorial cohesion has, however, a shorter policy history than its social and economic counterparts, and it remains subject to multiple and, at times, divergent interpretations. The challenges posed by EU enlargement (from 2005) and related growing disparities and increasing institutional diversity within the EU precipitated the emergence of the territorial cohesion of the EU as an important policy idea (see Bachtler et al. 2017). Addressing territorial inequalities within the EU framework has, furthermore, grown in importance since the 2008 economic crisis and the notable wave of immigration from outside the EU since 2015 (D 1.1, 3). The application of the concept in EU policy, may however, be dated to the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, whereas some of the underlying principles of territorial cohesion (discussed below) may be traced back to the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the founding treaty of the European Economic Community. The Second Report on Economic and Social Cohesion (CEC 2001) subsequently elaborated on the concept of territorial cohesion, understood as a spatial or territorial perspective on economic and social cohesion. Against this background, territorial cohesion could be viewed as extending the principles of a European social model from individuals and social groups to places and territories (Davoudi 2007, 83).

Subsequently in 2007, a Territorial Agenda of the European Union was adopted by EU Member States (TAEU 2007), followed by a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, published by the European Commission in 2008 (EC 2008). The Territorial Agenda of the EU was subsequently revised and updated in 2011 (TAEU 2011). The TAEU is understood as the successor to the European Spatial Development Perspective (1999), and marks a substantial shift in discourse from European spatial planning and spatial development policy to territorial cohesion as the focal point of EU spatial policy. The 2008 Green Paper is subtitled “*Turning Territorial Diversity into Strength*”, and emphasises the diversity or heterogeneity of the European territory as an asset for regional economic development and territorial competitiveness. The TAEU similarly focuses on the potential benefits stemming from harnessing territorial capital, and is comparatively silent on the question of combatting existing inequalities or disparities in levels of well-being and opportunity found across the EU. In the Third Cohesion Report (Commission of the European Communities, 2004), the responsibility of all regions in the EU, irrespective of location, to contribute to the realisation of economic growth and competitiveness is stressed:

“[I]f the EU is to realise its economic potential, then all regions wherever they are located, whether in existing Member States or in the new countries to join, need to be involved in the growth effort and all people living in the Union given the chance to contribute”.

This statement may be interpreted in terms of an inverted form of solidarity. Peripheral or poorly performing regions are required to express solidarity with higher performance regions through increased productivity and realisation of growth potential (D1.2) This statement is one example of a persistent rationale for territorial cohesion founded on instrumental values. Cohesion is valued not for its own sake but for its contribution to raising growth and competitiveness at the European level. This earlier rhetorical shift notwithstanding, it may be noted that during the 2000 to 2007 and 2008 to 2013 programming periods, territorial cohesion was primarily framed as an indicator of economic convergence among European states and regions. During the current period (2014-2020), a shift towards a more ‘citizen’ focused approach is evident, where accessibility to services, amenities and opportunities is given greater prominence (D1.2). In summary, a shift in emphasis from redistribution (distributional justice) to development potentials (just access to opportunities) is evident, in line with the political priorities and discourse of the Lisbon Strategy, first adopted by the European Council in 2000 and implemented in subsequent programming periods.

A third iteration of the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* (TAEU 2030) was adopted under the leadership of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU on 1st December 2020. The language

and content of the TAEU 2030 have been informed by the European Green Deal policy framework. Individual objectives are framed under the headings of ‘A Just Europe’ and ‘A Green Europe’. A ‘Just Europe’ is interpreted as one which “offers future perspectives for all places and people” (TAEU 2030, p. 14). This is in line with the future orientation of the European Green Deal and associated Just Transition Mechanism (JTM). The latter comprises a public sector loan facility managed by the European Commission together with the European Investment Bank. The remit of the JTM is to support regions with a high dependence on carbon-intensive energy sources (such as coal) in their transition to a sustainable, green economy (European Commission 2020). It is thus an articulation of solidarity among Member States - conditional on a transition to a green economy. More broadly, the concept of ‘just transition’ alludes to a temporal dimension of justice, over time and across generations. Progressive understandings of spatial justice must take seriously the social and environmental challenges associated with a transition to a post-growth sustainable economy (see for example Vasconcellos Oliveira 2018). The normative content of the concepts of spatial justice and territorial cohesion is not further specified within the TAEU 2030. Lür & Böhme (2020) are critical of the capacity of the TAEU 2030 to contribute to reducing spatial inequalities in Europe, due to a lack of concrete implementation mechanisms and resourcing. They suggest, however, that it can provide European, national and sub-national decision-makers with ‘ideas and inspiration’ on how to address spatial disparities in an appropriate way (ibid, p. 11).

Previous IMAJINE reports (D 1.1, 14) stressed that the ambiguity of the concept of territorial cohesion does not have a clear meaning. It was stated: “territorial cohesion is a somewhat elusive spatial imaginary where it is not always clear whether the concept refers to a policy objective which is pursued through a particular policy means or whether territorial cohesion is the policy tool or technology itself for obtaining certain policy goals” (see also D 1.2). In academic publications, it is variously understood as a mode of governing, a normative policy objective and/or as a spatial framework (see Table 1 below).

Interpretation of Territorial Cohesion	Key Dimensions
Territorial cohesion as a mode of governing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated approach - Open method of coordination - Multilevel governance - Evidence-based policy - Territorial dimension
Territorial cohesion as a normative policy objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Balanced development - Competitiveness - Territorial capital - Sustainable development - Solidarity - Spatial justice
Territorial cohesion as a spatial framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Polycentrism - Place-based development - EU territory as a whole - Functional Europe - Spatial division of labour

Table 1: Interpretations and Dimensions of Territorial Cohesion⁵.

For the purposes of this report, territorial cohesion is understood, primarily, as a normative policy objective, analogous to spatial justice. Territorial cohesion and spatial justice should not, however, be considered as synonymous. They have distinct conceptual histories and associative meanings. Jones et al. (2019, 212-213) highlight the progressive potential of the discourse of spatial justice. They note its potential to be ‘flexible and inclusive’, with the capacity to bring diverse stakeholders together around a common agenda. From this perspective, spatial justice is a powerful concept with significant potential for political mobilisation. Furthermore, they suggest a rights-based approach, focussed on the capabilities of regional actors rather than the distribution of goods or opportunities across space. Emphasis is hereby placed on the capacity of regions to ‘shape their own socio-spatial futures’, an orientation aligned with the discursive framing of the TAEU 2030 and its focus on just transition. Finally, Jones et al. place emphasis on the plurality of understandings of development, justice and well-being and the scope for the development of situated, regionally-embedded formulations of these goals. It follows that spatial justice is a concept which does not require singular, universal definition, but rather must be defined through processes of discourse articulation and negotiation at multiple scales, from the local to the transnational.

Territorial cohesion, as a policy concept and principle, has been applied primarily at the European scale. There is, however, some evidence that the discourse of territorial cohesion has informed policy-

⁵ Adapted from D 1.1. Table 2 (page 15).

making at lower spatial scales. Demeterova et al⁶ (2020) examined interpretations and perceptions of territorial cohesion among stakeholders in central European borderlands. In this context, the discourse of territorial cohesion is associated with processes of cross-border cooperation, i.e. cohesion across territorial borders. European spatial policy discourse, in its previous iterations, has informed the preparation of national and regional spatial strategies in Ireland, the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Baltic states (see Adams et al 2011, 2014, Davoudi & Strange 2009). To take one example, the current National Planning Framework of the Republic of Ireland (DHPLG 2018) is centred on the concept of ‘balanced growth’, in reference to a concern to redress a persistent imbalance (or spatial injustice) in socioeconomic opportunities, between the Dublin city-region and the rest of the country. A fuller review of the application and interpretation of territorial cohesion at lower spatial scales is beyond the scope of this report.

5. Relational Qualities of Spatial Justice

Building on the conceptual review undertaken under D 1.1 and the above discussion of relational space, relational values and solidarity, it is possible to make the following observations pertinent to our elaboration of the relational qualities of spatial justice:

1) A relational approach to **spatial analysis and policy-making** implies a focus on **relationships across space** rather than the **attributes of specific spatial categories**. From this perspective, **urban-rural** and **local-global relations** are identified as key dimensions of access and accessibility. Furthermore, rural areas are recognised to be connected to global networks (**rural-global relations**) and to other rural areas (**rural-rural**) rather than being constrained by relations of dependence with regional urban centres (e.g. Woods & McDonagh 2011). Both rural and urban areas are understood to be highly diverse, socially, culturally and economically. Indeed, in many cases hybrid **‘in-between-spaces’** are replacing sharp boundaries between urban and rural areas (e.g. Sieverts 2003, Qviström 2019).

2) **Core-periphery relations** are **relative, not absolute**, vary from sector to sector and shift over time. The ESDP sought to replace previous taken-for-granted ideas of a **European ‘core’ and ‘periphery’** with the concept of **polycentricity**, a Europe of multiple centres, each understood to have both a regional and global reach (Davoudi 2003). The concept of polycentricity remains relevant today, and can inform planning practice at national and sub-national scales (e.g. Humer 2018). Fostering polycentric development can contribute to ameliorating existing patterns of uneven development, impacting service provision, labour markets and regional development capacities. Significant

⁶ IMAJINE research output.

disparities, nevertheless continue to exist, and rural areas in Eastern Europe, in particular, continue to face **structural challenges**.

3) **Physical factors of accessibility, density of settlement, infrastructure and service provision** continue to have a significant influence on the geographical distribution of **life chances and opportunities** across Europe. Cohesion policy pays particular attention to regions with specific geographical characteristics such as mountainous regions, islands and sparsely populated areas. It is recognised that these regions face particular challenges and additional costs in terms of accessibility and infrastructure provision **due to their physical location** (ESPON 2017). Physical location must, however, always be understood in relative terms i.e. **location in relation to other places**. Indeed, the relationship between physical and social factors is complex with perceptions of isolation, rurality or peripherality informing subjective identities at an interpersonal level. It may be noted that the current shift to online formats as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic may contribute to a positive (if temporary) shift in the balance of accessibility for some such regions. It may also be noted, that a number of small islands, have successfully harnessed their specific geographical character to become forerunners in sustainable energy generation and climate change mitigation.

4) **Relations across space** are **contingent and dynamic** but also imbued with **power relations**. Despite increased attention to opportunities arising from dynamic, non-hierarchical network-based relations, it is recognised that power relations remain relevant and that **relations of uneven development** continue to be a characteristic spatial outcome of contemporary models of economic development. In the aftermath of the 2008-2009 financial crisis, it became clear to what extent the economies and social systems of a number of Member States, located primarily in southern and eastern Europe are vulnerable to external shocks. Indeed, critical commentators suggest that the larger economies in the 'core' of Europe continue to benefit from a position of economic dominance, which accentuates already existing relations of uneven development (e.g. Hadjimichaelis 2011, Celi 2018).

5) **Personal and collective identities** are increasingly **relational, multiple and multi-scalar**. Freedom of movement of people within Europe and the possibility for individuals to gain citizenship of more than one EU Member State, have contributed to greater awareness and acceptance of multiple and hybrid identities which reflect the complexity of individual biographies and family histories. The nation-state is, in many, cases, no longer the principal locus of place-based identity. Individuals may experience a stronger sense of belonging with respect to the city or region they live in or come from or as part of a geographically diffuse diasporic communities (Paasi 2013). The popularity of ideas of urban citizenship and a 'right to the city' reflect a greater sense of identification with, and perhaps

responsibility, for city spaces on the part of certain social groups. In similar manner, a 'right to rural space' may form part of a progressive discourse on rural spatial justice (Woods 2020). The diverse experiences of **contested territories** demonstrate the continued social and political relevance of questions of **regional and national identity** and their implications for autonomous decision-making capacity (see D 7.2). In both Belgium and Northern Ireland, for example, important steps have been taken towards formal recognition and representation of cultural diversity decoupled from the political control of territory.

6) **Political-administrative boundaries** continue to provide the **dominant basis for decision-making**. Despite the developments outlined above, political and administrative boundaries at both national and sub-national levels continue to provide the dominant basis for decision-making (e.g. Faludi 2018). This can lead to a lack of coordination across the EU territory, as evident for example in relation to migration policy or the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. **Governance cultures, ways of working and modes of decision-making** continue to differ significantly across Europe, decades of European integration notwithstanding. Legal traditions, institutional arrangements and planning cultures pertaining to spatial governance and land-use regulation vary substantially among European countries, cities and regions (e.g. Berisha et al 2021). **Transboundary policy learning** continues to require time and effort to understand the specificities of particular contexts and assess the added value of translation and transfer to a new context. Regions located at or across borders between member states continue to require dedicated support for **cross-border cooperation** initiatives, institutions and structures to foster cross-border learning and mitigate against negative border effects (e.g. Nienaber & Wille 2020).

7) **Nation-states** continue to provide the **dominant frame of reference** for the articulation of the **common interest** and **public good** in Europe. Spatial justice requires the cultivation of a **transnational public sphere**, transcending the boundaries of nation-states (Fraser 2007, Rygiel & Baban 2019). **Political solidarity** must move beyond its state-centric origins, building on a progressive sense of place, and reflecting the dense networks of transnational interpersonal and socio-economic relationships connecting European cities and regions today.

8) A progressive, relational understanding of spatial justice can open a space for **critical discourse on normative societal goals**, moving **beyond economic growth and competitiveness**, to consider alternatives values and perspectives. A relational understanding of spatial justice can act as a necessary to **counterpoint to populist movements** and their **retreat to essentialist concepts** of fixed identities and bounded territorial spaces (also Jones et al 2019).

9) Finally, a progressive politics of space must engage with **relations across time and as well as space**. Future place-based scenarios must grapple with the challenges of *intergenerational justice*, associated with a *transition to a sustainable, green economy and society*.

6. Concluding Comments

This report has outlined a new a perspective on spatial justice in Europe, a perspective that takes both relational space and relational values seriously. Against the background of current and recent crises facing the European territory, the shared transnational values and common interests which have served to bring European peoples and nations together since the founding of the European Union, are found to be fragile and vulnerable. Particular, national interests, framed in right-wing populist terms, undermine the foundations of European solidarity, and, as a consequence, the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. Spatial justice concerns the capacity of the EU polity to manage, regulate and contain processes of uneven development, which otherwise lead to an accentuation of existing socio-economic disparities among cities and regions in Europe.

Spatial justice as formulated here, in contrast, is a normative concept founded on ideals of solidarity and community and oriented towards a shared European future. In foregrounding relational connectivities across space, it moves beyond state-centric perspectives. This implies an alternative vision or imaginary of Europe, where nation-state boundaries are still relevant, but are no longer centre stage (see Davoudi 2018, Faludi 2018). The complexity of contemporary socio-spatial relations requires a reconsideration of established categories of domestic and foreign, urban and rural, core and periphery, local and global. A relational perspective on spatial justice is furthermore, founded on a recognition that contemporary individual and collective identities are not fixed in place, but are multi-scalar, transboundary, multiple and contested.

Mobilising a progressive discourse on spatial justice requires innovative forms of policy-making, fostering the development of alternative spatial imaginaries. Processes of strategic spatial planning have the potential to foster 'transformative practices' - challenging existing structural constraints on the basis of future visions of what a place might become (Albrechts, 2010, 1116, Healey 2006). The 'visual language' of spatial planning, provides a powerful communicative medium, with the capacity to reframe existing spatial vocabularies and imaginaries in relational terms, foregrounding functional connectivities and liminal spaces in place of fixed territorial borders and boundaries (Dühr 2007, Walsh 2020). Future scenarios, informed by a relational understanding of spatial justice, represent a first step in the articulation and negotiation of new progressive, relational politics of place.

7. References

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