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INTEGRATED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION VISION

**Theoretical
article**

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JEL Classification

R10

Abstract:

This paper analyzes the new conceptual framework of the Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020. Thus, the paper presents a change of perspective in the Cohesion Policy regarding territorial development and a new vision on integrated development. This new vision presents explanations about the new family of concepts (Structural and Investment Funds, Europe 2020 Strategy, Common Strategic Framework, Partnership Agreement, etc.) used in 2014-2020.

The changes made by the European Commission at Cohesion Policy level for 2014-2020 programming period, open new opportunities for the development of integrated operations leading to strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion of the entire union.

The herein used research method consists in bibliographic research performed based on information found in the literature and on the official websites of the European Union.

Introduction

Johannes Hahn, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy (for cohesion) stated that the cohesion policy of the European Union is *one of the most resounding success stories of European integration*. Due to the fact that Europe's project regarding economic integration is addressed to all EU Member states, the Cohesion Policy is and will be a basic policy for all EU regions. Thus, in order to increase the efficiency of this policy, Johannes Hahn suggests for the forthcoming period (2014 – 2020 programming period) the setting of a limited number of priorities, according to Europe Strategy 2020 and avoiding the multiplication and fragmentation of Community funds. In order to achieve these objectives the following will be considered: simplifying the functioning rules of the cohesion policy, paying a greater attention to the results, and combining EU financing with local, regional, national or private budgets in order to obtain a maximum effect for investments support (Panorama Inforegio no. 33, 2010:23).

The main objective of the Cohesion Policy is neither the reduction of poverty, nor the change of the national social protection systems. Its purpose is to finance the projects in order to hasten development, promote equality, improve the quality of life and increase the chances for hiring, all this in order to reduce the numbers that reflect the poverty risk. According to article 158 from the EC Treaty, the Community's objective is *the reduction of discrepancies between the development levels of different regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions or islands, including rural areas*. Unfortunately, these objectives are difficult to achieve because of *the vast heterogeneity of the European Union's regions as far as their geographical dimension and location, the level of their incomes and their political importance are concerned* (Panorama Inforegio no. 35, 2010:4).

Within the European model, the cohesion policy constitutes the community's instrument by means of which the economic convergence process is supported. It results in a great build-up of factors of production and an improvement of their productivity (meaning a higher development rate), and in the economic modernization of the beneficiary regions (countries) (Marina , 2008:16). Thus, the cohesion policy aims to ensure the interregional convergence and, on this basis, to achieve a convergence between Member States (Marina , 2008:52).

Regionalization

The regionalization of the states is viewed as a support for the European integration process.

According to Balaam David, regionalization is "a process by means of which groups of states from the same geographical area agree to cooperate and to increase their responsibility in order to achieve

common goals" (Popescu-Bîrlan, 2009:12). A similar definition is given by Thompson (1999:63) who states that regionalization "means the process, which gathers states and regions based on their geographical proximity, due to saving advantages regarding transportation and the information cost or due to security or environmental problems" (Ciurcanu, 2004/2005:2).

Regionalization can be made both at the national or international level (for example: European Union, Benelux countries, Scandinavian countries).

Turning to the national level, regionalization represents a middle solution for solving different problems emerged at the national level. Regionalization is a territorial organizational level of the state, implying the creation of regional institutions and transferring the related competencies to them (Andrei, 2009:50). Thus, the regionalization process emerged from the desire to solve different conflicts, which appeared following excessive administrative centralization and from the intent to reduce the distance between decision-makers and those of whose interests (regions) are required to be correctly managed. The main objective of regionalization is represented by the reduction of regional imbalances and the harmonious development within a national territory or between several national territories.

Integrated approach to development within the Cohesion Policy

The "integrated" concept refers to approaching communities in a comprehensive manner, considering the connections and the way in which the essential fields in the life of a community are influenced: economic development, education, transport, environment, healthcare services, etc. (according to Open Society Foundation).

The integrated approach requires a close coordination of public policies in order to guarantee the success of a harmonious development at local/regional level. Thus, there is no point in selecting a single field of the policy, for example tourism, without considering the environment, transportation, education and other fields of the economic policy.

From Brian Robson's point of view (Prof. at Manchester University) the added value generated by the integrated approach consists in (Panorama Inforegio no. 34, 2010:8):

- *creating a connection between different fields of economy* (for example: transportation, environment, employment, social aspects), which, by interacting, influence the economic development. However, establishing common priorities for all these different fields is fairly difficult, due to the fact that each field has its own objectives, budgets and priorities.

Hence, local economic development will have to identify the mutual impact between these fields, which are separated from an institutional point of view.

- *identifying the space/territory* in which the integrated approach is performed (for example: *local territory* that is defined as being *the space in which activities specific to local economy are developed, having as local players all the persons and organizations, which significantly contribute to the local development process* - according to Matei and Anghelescu 2009:14);
- *creating integrated partnerships* (by reuniting the private, public and voluntarism sectors).

In the Panorama 34 (2010:5) magazine for the "How does the integrated approach adapt to a territorially defined policy and European cohesion policy?" question, we find the following answer: within the cohesion policy, the day-to-day implementation of the programmes highlights the necessity to work together with multiple governance levels (European, national, regional and local), which increases the consistency and synergy between different policies, as well as spreading best practice.

Territorial approach highlights the necessity to work with a more flexible concept regarding the geographical space, this could be a narrow one (for example in the case of islands or of urban neighbourhoods) or a wider one (as the case of metropolitan regions or of the macro regions as the Baltic Sea).

The integrated approach of development dates back to the beginnings of the European Community's creation (named European Union by means of the Treaty of Maastricht, signed in 1992), when both territorial and demographic disparities were registered, aspects that constituted real obstacles in the way of European integration and development. The first step in removing these obstacles was performed in 1957, when the six founding countries (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg) of the European Union signed the Treaty of Rome, their objective being based on ensuring a harmonious development "*by reducing the gaps between some regions and of the slow development in case of disadvantaged regions*" (Panorama Inforegio no. 34, 2010:4).

Hence, during the next years a series of European funds were created with the purpose of diminishing the differences between the development levels of the European regions and to help disadvantaged regions, thus:

- by means of the Treaty of Rome (1957) two structural funds were created:

European social fund (ESF) and European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF);

- in 1975, a new fund was created, named the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);

The *social cohesion* term started to be used in Western Europe at the beginning of 1980, when the first signs of poor functioning of the economic activity due to the increase of unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, etc., were noticed. (Concilier flexibilit  du travail et coh sion social, 2007:43). At the initiative of the European Commission led by Jacques Delors, the economic and social cohesion falls within the framework of the Single European Act (1986), aiming to "*reduce the differences between regions and the backwardness of disadvantaged regions*".

The Treaties of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2001) restated the importance of the policy and its scope was even wider by means of the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), which in 2008, introduced the third dimension of the cohesion, namely the *territorial* one. Therefore, besides the economic and social aspect, the cohesion policy will have in sight a *more balanced and sustainable territorial development* (Panorama Inforegio no. 26, 2008:2).

Within the European model, the cohesion policy constitutes the community's instrument by means of which the economic convergence process is supported. This results in a great build-up of production factors and an improvement of their productivity (meaning a higher development rate) and in the economic modernization of the beneficiary regions (Marina , 2008:16).

According to Dirk Ahner (director general for regional policy), the cohesion policy made and still makes it possible for national, regional and local governments to get involved in fundamental strategies and in the creation of some networks, which go beyond the physical and national politics borders. Thus, *in time the cohesion policy adapted without losing sight of its main objective, that is, ensuring a balanced and sustainable development for the European regions* (Panorama Inforegio no. 26, 2008:1).

Nowadays, the cohesion policy is a mature development policy based on the resources and people within the territory. Hence, the cohesion policy is also a local policy, because it pays attention to each European territory, which represents an important advantage for solving their problems. These will have to adapt to global economic issues due to (Panorama Inforegio no. 26, 2008:4):

- ✓ *climatic changes* - that represent a threat for some sectors and an opportunity for others;
- ✓ *demographic and ageing population changes* - that will

entail new policies on the labour market;

- ✓ *social risks associated to economic changes* - that will require new approaches of the problem.

Economists think that regional and local development will become more important in solving these problems.

Cohesion Policy during the 2014 - 2020 programming period

During 2014 - 2020, the action of the *Cohesion Policy* simplifies in comparison to the period between 2007 - 2013, thus, through the funds: ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), ESF (European Social Fund) and the Cohesion Fund, two important objectives will be aimed (Table No. 1):

- *Investments made to increase the number of jobs* (objective resulting from the merger between the "Convergence" and "Regional competitiveness and employment" objectives existing during 2007 - 2013) in the Member States and regions benefiting from contributions from the funds.
- *European territorial cooperation*, benefiting from contributions from ERDF.

By means of these two objectives the alignment with the Europe 2020 strategy is aimed, that is, achieving the three thematic priorities based on an intelligent, sustainable and favourable for inclusion growth (Panorama Info regio no. 40 2011/2012:8).

In order to stimulate progress within each thematic priority, the European Commission adopted *seven emblematic initiatives* (summarized on the three thematic priorities of Europe 2020 strategy in Table No. 2), which would engage both the EU and the Member States in starting-up several real actions, which would stimulate economic growth and the creation of new jobs.

The measures, undertaken for the alignment of the Cohesion Policy to the objective of Europe 2020 strategy, lead to a new approach when it comes to strategic planning, which implies:

- *Common Strategic Framework* - a guide useful for:
 - ✓ *identifying the priorities regarding investments* that will be made during the 2014 - 2020 programming period (in Member States and regions);
 - ✓ *combining different funds* (Figure No.1) in order for the made investments to bring maximum benefits both to territories and to citizens.
- *Partnership Contract/Agreement*

The Common Strategic Framework is the document that will be used by the national and regional authorities for the elaboration of the Partnership Agreement with the Commission, based on which national programmes financed by the Structural and Investment Funds will be performed (Figure No.1).

- *Operational programmes*

Through the Operational Programmes, the priority investments, which will contribute to the national objectives achievement (established according to the Europe 2020 strategy) provided within the Partnership Agreement signed with the Commission, will be determined.

The 2014 - 2020 period brings a change as far as the legislative architecture of the cohesion policy is concerned, which will include (according to the Cohesion Policy 2014 - 2020, p.3):

- *a general regulation* regarding the setting of some *common dispositions* regarding all 5 European funds, respectively: ERDF (European Regional Development Fund), ESF (European Social Fund), Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), as well as the setting of some *general dispositions* regarding ERDF, ESF and the Cohesion Fund (COM (2011) 615, 2011:14);
- *three specific regulations* regarding the funds: ERDF, ESF and the Cohesion Fund;
- *two regulations* regarding the objective of the European Territorial Cooperation and European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Romania's Partnership Agreement with the European Commission

A first document regarding Romania's Partnership Agreement with the European Commission was subject to public consultation on the 1st of October 2014. In this document five challenges regarding development were debated, regarding (according to the Cohesion Policy and Romania document, p.2):

- *economic competitiveness*, through a more compact and modern research and development environment, which would emphasize the requirements of companies and also the competitive sectors of Romania.
- *people and society* by consolidating employment, social inclusion and educational policies;
- *infrastructure* by improving the accessibility of the Romanian regions and by interconnecting international market,

by improving the sustainability of the transportation mix, the reduction of travel time, etc.;

- *resources* by passing to an economy with reduced carbon emissions, promoting the adaptation to environmental changes, making resources efficient, promoting the environment, etc.
- *administration and governing* by optimizing the institutional environment and by improving public services offered by the administration and justice.

Hence, during the 2014-2020 programming period Romania will make investments through the operational programmes within all 11 thematic objectives launched, by means of the Cohesion Policy and in concordance with the 2020 Strategy.

Investments will be made through the Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), these being among the most important instruments necessary for reducing development disparities between Romanian regions, as well as between those existing between Romania and the other Member States (according to the Guide to best practice..., pp. 44-46). Besides the Structural and Investment Funds, the first version of the Partnership Agreement 2014 - 2020 and the two new instruments (taken from the first part of the Common Strategic Framework) necessary for an integrated approach to territorial development (according to Elements of a Common Strategic Framework 2014-2020, p.9):

- *Local development put under the responsibility of the community (LDRC)* is an instrument through which these are followed:
 - ✓ the efficient use of the existing resources within an area;
 - ✓ the design and development of some integrated activities;
 - ✓ the creation of a common vision by refinancing the operations, which can exploit the local resources to the maximum and by promoting the local specific.
- *Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)* represents an instrument that stimulates integrated development based on local needs, which will determine the creation of a synergy between the European structural funds and other financing resources (national or local budget), thus avoiding the financing of some disparate or divergent projects.

The Romanian government intends to use the ITI instrument in the following types of territories (according to the Guide to best practice ..., p.48):

- *Functional urban areas;*

- *Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve.*

In the first type of territory (*functional urban areas*) - the multi-fund approach (ERDF and ESF) will be used for the ITI implementation, based on two main objectives:

- *the progression of major development areas (national and regional development engines);*
- *a balanced territorial development, which ensures equitable access to general interest services.*

The determination of *functional urban areas* will be made, based on complex criteria, for example: areas that have a higher concentration of population and economic activity, areas that have specific integrated development strategies etc.

The second type of territory (*Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation*), aimed for ITI implementation, is a unique small territory with highly specific functions: rare, isolated population, economic vulnerability, unsatisfactory access to services etc. The integrated strategy for this area is under elaboration with the support of the World Bank.

On the 6th of August 2014, the European Commission adopted the final version of the Partnership Agreement with Romania, for the 2014 - 2020 programming period, Romania benefiting from European funds worth approximately 40 billion Euros, of which over 23 billion Euros are assigned to the Cohesion Policy (according to the European Commission _ Represented in Romania).

Integrated urban development

The defence of citizens' interests and of the local community, to which they belong, was for the first time institutionalized through the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), through the creation of the Committee of the Regions, whose purpose was that of consolidating economic and social cohesion for the local and regional community and defending the principle of subsidiarity. The Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) reiterated the enhancement of the integration degree, paying an increased attention to the problems of the local communities of the European Union's regions (Porojan and Iftimoaie 2008:17-18).

Furthermore, the Treaty of Lisbon added territorial cohesion to the objectives of the cohesion policy, emphasizing mainly the following (according to The Fifth Report regarding Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion document, pp.8-9):

- *the role of the cities* - that can be growth engines and centres of creativity and innovation;
- *on the areas that deal with specific geographic and demographic problems* -

territorial cohesion focuses on approaching the relationships between the urban and rural environment, considering the access to infrastructure, healthcare services, education, environmental protection etc.

The Ministers responsible for the arrangement of the territory and the territorial development, in the cooperation with the European Commission and with the agreement of the Committee of the Regions, have revised the Territorial Agenda released in 2007 and have designed the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (AT 2020).

Within Territorial Agenda 2020 *six territorial priorities* were set for the European Union, which can contribute to successful implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, regarding (according to the Territorial Agenda of 2020 EU document, 2011:7-10):

1. The promotion of multi-centred and balanced territorial development;
2. The encouragement of the integrated development in cities, and specific rural regions (Leipzig Charter, the Declaration of Toledo);
3. The territorial integration in the cross-border and transnational functional regions;
4. The assurance of global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies;
5. The improvement of territorial connections between individuals, communities and companies;
6. The management and connection of the ecologic, landscape and cultural values of the regions.

Nowadays, an intense attention is paid to the urban places under territorial development, creating a series of measures that would sustain the attractiveness of urban centres and the increase of their local/regional role, by promoting the urban regeneration, the integrated approach in urban development and the enforcement of urban-rural and urban-urban relationships. In this respect, we notice the involvement of the European Commission, which aims to stimulate the integrated urban policies by means of the following approaches (according to the Territorial Dimension 2014-2020 document):

- Integrated investment strategies that have a more emphasized strategic and holistic approach;
- Funding layaway for integrated sustainable urban development;
- Creating an urban development platform;
- Innovating actions in urban areas;
- A strong emphasis on urban development at a strategic level;

- Improved instruments for performing integrated actions;
- Enhanced opportunities regarding the approach of urban challenges aimed by the investment priorities;
- Financial instruments;
- Creating networks

The European Commission, in the communication from 15th of May 2013 named "*Empowering Local Authorities from partner countries for governance enhancement and more effective development outcomes*" highlights the decisive role that local authorities from urban areas have for solving the problems regarding sustainable development.

During the 2014-2020 funding period about 50% of the *European Regional Development Fund* (approximately 80 - 90 billion Euros) will be invested in *urban areas* through the operational programmes of integration. Furthermore, a minimum proportion of 5% of the *national allocation from ERDF* will be assigned to *integrated sustainable urban development* in order to guarantee the fact that it represents a priority in all Member States (according to The Urban dimension of EU policies document 2014:6).

The adoption of an integrated approach, in order to achieve local/regional economic development, requires the use of some strategies by the local players, which would aim real needs, without giving up on the temptation of spending resources on individual sectors. In order to do so, it is necessary to establish some objectives and goals based on the analysis of the region's difficulties. Local strategies must not be disconnectedly created, they must take into consideration the strategies that are implemented in other areas, such as the neighbouring areas. Thus, an integrated approach, based on actions coordinated between several areas, will generate better outcomes than individual initiatives (Panorama Inforegio no. 34, 2010:5).

Conclusions

The actions made by the European Union regarding integrated development represent the chance of many territories from the European Union to solve the problems that exist at local level, through common partnerships and by combining the European funds (they are presented in the document named *Common Strategic Framework*) and the instruments elaborated by the European Commission.

An integrated development is needed in order to ensure a stable and strong European Union from an economic and social point of view.

As far as the future of the Cohesion Policy during the 2014 - 2020 period is concerned, we notice an increased attention to territorial and integrated approach of policies, taking into consideration the existing diversity and specificity

at local and regional level and their transformation into territorially centred policies.

Integrated local actions must give a major importance to the relationships between cities and adjacent rural areas in order to create a domino effect outside urban centres. Hence, the interaction between natural and human resources, innovation and infrastructure is coordinated so as to ensure the desired benefits to all local players.

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Table no. 1
Architecture of Cohesion Policy

| ARCHITECTURE OF COHESION POLICY | | | | |
|---|------------------------------|---|---|------------------------------|
| 2007-2013 | | | 2014-2020 | |
| Objectives | Financial instruments |  | Objectives | Financial instruments |
| Convergence | ERDF ESF Cohesion Fund |  | Investments made to increase the number of jobs | ERDF ESF Cohesion Fund |
| Regional competitiveness and employment | ERDF ESF | | | |
| European territorial cooperation | ERDF |  | European territorial cooperation | ERDF |
| 3 objectives | 3 instruments | | 2 objectives | 3 instruments |

Source: made by the author, based on the information gathered from the document entitled: *Cohesion Policy 2007-2013*, p.12, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2007/publications/guide2007_ro.pdf

Table no. 2
Emblematic initiatives adopted by the European Commission

| No. | Thematic priorities | Emblematic initiatives |
|------------|----------------------------|--|
| 1. | Intelligent growth | <i>A Union of innovation</i> |
| | | <i>Youth on the move</i> |
| | | <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> |
| 2. | Sustainable growth | <i>An efficient Europe considering the use of resources</i> |
| | | <i>An industrial policy adapted to the globalization era</i> |
| 3. | Growth favouring inclusion | <i>An agenda for new competencies and new jobs</i> |
| | | <i>A European platform for fighting poverty</i> |

Source: made by the author, based on the information presented in the *Europe 2020* document, p.7, document available online at: http://www.mae.ro/sites/default/files/file/Europa2021/Strategia_Europa_2020.pdf

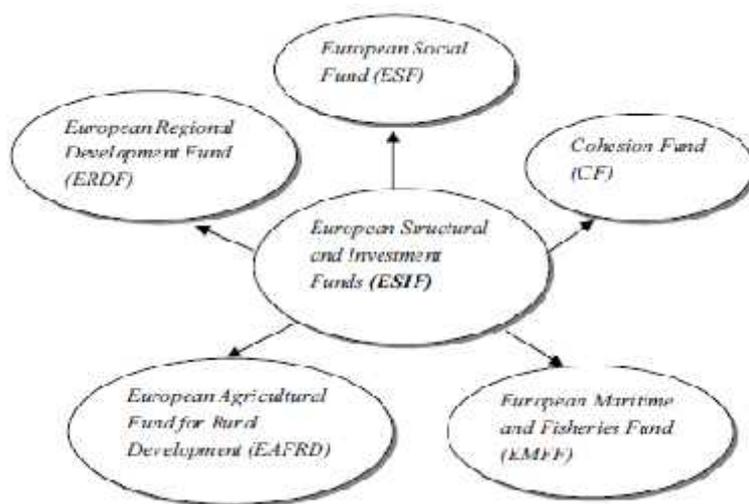


Figure No.1. Structural and Investment Funds during 2014-2020

Source: made by the author, based on the information available on the website of the European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/contracts_grants/funds_ro.htm