

European territorial cohesion policies: Parallels to socialist central planning?

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Abstract

Contemporary EU territorial cohesion policy presents some striking reminders of features of socialist central planning. The objective of socio-spatial solidarity aimed at balanced spatial development is a core principle of both spatial planning doctrines. Reviewing key planning documents, this article compares territorial cohesion discourses in terms of their normative and analytical natures in order to critically evaluate the uniqueness and novelty of the current modern concept. In spite of ideological contradictions, a commonly-shared realisation of the importance of urban agglomerations as specific integrated spatial units and the need to improve living conditions in disadvantaged areas, are crucial characteristics for both spatial planning policies. Moreover, analytical spatial planning procedures are based on similar methods and lead to nearly identical results concerning the spatial pattern for one specific case settlement system (the South Moravian Region, Czech Republic). In this respect, the currently-emphasised territorial cohesion discourse is familiar to that in former socialist areas in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on these findings, spatial planning authorities should learn from the past in reflecting on the limitations and advantages of spatial planning in the socialist era.

Keywords: territorial cohesion, socialist central planning, settlement systems, European Union, Czech Republic

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1. Introduction

‘Territorial cohesion’ has become a conceptual buzzword often quoted in European regional and spatial planning policies. It is a frequent subject of theoretical discussions concerning balanced socio-economic development, as well as a goal of planning and decision-making practices. The broad thematic scope and an underdeveloped analytical apparatus, however, make this concept rather elusive in terms of its operationalisation and evaluation. It seems there is no single definition of territorial cohesion; instead, it is used as an umbrella term covering several purpose-built conceptual frameworks and approaches.

The term ‘territorial cohesion’ appeared in official EU documents for the first time in 1997 in the Amsterdam Treaty, with regard to the importance of services of general economic interest (SGEI). Here, the declared access to SGEI is understood as the cornerstone of territorial cohesion, but without any detailed specifications (Sauter, 2008). Later, the concept has become part of the regular reports on economic, social and territorial cohesion. The Third Cohesion Report defines territorial cohesion in a rather normative manner as a state of balanced development, reducing existing disparities and territorial imbalances (EC, 2004). A likely more meaningful statement, however,

is that “people should not be disadvantaged by wherever they happen to live or work in the Union” (EC, 2004, p. 27). Corresponding with this formulation, Martin and Ross (in Davoudi, 2005) suggest that the territorial cohesion concept “spatialises” some variety of so-called biographical risks, such as unemployment, disability, poverty, etc. In other words, an individual’s life chances reflect not only his or her position within the system of social interdependencies but, at the same time, their position within the structure of territorial interdependencies. As Molle (2007, p. 84) points out, territorial cohesion is “a situation whereby people and firms are not unduly handicapped by spatial differences in access to basic services, basic infrastructure and knowledge”. The concept of territorial cohesion enunciated here echoes significantly the ideas of spatial justice understood as the “fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and opportunities to use them” (Soja, 2009, p. 2).

Employing a critical spatial perspective, research attention is drawn not only to the qualities of particular places and territories, but, more implicitly, to their organisation in physical, socio-economic and political space. As places of work and living do not exist as isolated geographic entities, place-based qualities and opportunities stem from the complex networks of territorial interdependencies mentioned above.

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Each particular urban system involves a specific arrangement of territorial interdependencies reflecting, among many other factors, political strategies articulated in the form of planning doctrines and policies. Spatial planning can be therefore regarded as an important ‘platform’ translating essentially political concepts of territorial cohesion into the worlds of everyday urban activities. Planning interventions usually follow normatively-defined narratives of a territorially coherent society, applying tools related to the spatial (re)distribution of valued resources.

The general aim of this paper is to look more closely at the conceptualisation of territorial cohesion in two distinct periods of modern history. The contemporary operationalisation of the territorial cohesion concept implemented in EU countries will be compared with the central planning doctrines endorsed by socialist regimes. Such an historical excursion could shed light on the currently proclaimed territorial cohesion concept. Special attention will be paid to the political discourse framing the territorial cohesion concept in both of the periods, and particular spatial policies which shape the functional geographies of interdependent places and territories will be examined. The paper indicates that territorial cohesion is an evolving concept deeply rooted in its spatial and political contexts. The comparison then focuses on a Czech case study (the South Moravian Region), as the changing socio-economic and political conditions, as well as the development of relevant planning tools, will be critically explored with the aim of disclosing the scale of conceptual shifts and their imprints on planning practice.

2. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of territorial cohesion

2.1 Territorial cohesion in current EU planning doctrine

Achieving territorial cohesion is currently one of the main objectives of EU regional policy. The territorial dimension was officially attached to the goals of economic and social cohesion by the Lisbon Treaty (EC, 2007b). Thus, today, regional policy represents economic, social and territorial cohesion policy (Cohesion Policy). As a shared competence between EU and its member states, territorial cohesion aims at a coordination of policies with spatial impact to ensure integrated territorial development (Faludi, 2013). From this normative and theoretical perspective, the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 defines territorial cohesion as “a set of principles for harmonious, balanced, efficient, sustainable territorial development. It enables equal opportunities for citizens and enterprises, wherever they are located, to make the most of their territorial potentials” (EU Ministers responsible for Spatial Development, 2011, p. 2). Based on this quotation it can be assumed that territorial cohesion is characterised (besides its political nature) by a strong spatial planning dimension that includes an aspect of social and spatial solidarity.

This general and ambiguous definition, however, results in a number of different interpretations and reflections about the sense and relevance of the territorial cohesion concept (see, e.g. Davoudi, 2005; Doucet, 2006; Evers, 2008; Schön, 2005; Servillo, 2010). The most noticeable confusion associated with the concept is a simultaneous promotion of the principle of solidarity and also the competitiveness of

European regions and Europe as a whole. In this regard, Waterhout (2007) identifies the storyline “Competitive Europe”, stressing the need for a competitive European territory, which stands in contrast to the traditionally understood meaning of territorial cohesion emerging in the storyline “Europe in Balance”¹. Given the purpose of this paper, the meaning of territorial cohesion emphasizing balanced development will be used.

With regard to decision-making processes, the objective is to make “both sectoral policies which have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent” (EC, 2004, p. 27). Additionally, more effective coordination of EU policies, member states’ authorities, private actors, planners and regional or local authorities is required. The system of multi-level governance should be able to manage functioning of various territories and enhance territorial cohesion (Finka and Kluvánková, 2015). Respecting the principle of subsidiarity and the so-called bottom-up approach, vertical and horizontal coordination between decision-making bodies at different levels and sector-related policies is supposed to secure consistency and synergy within the process of achieving territorial cohesion (EU Ministers responsible for Spatial Development, 2011).

Reaching territorial cohesion should be based on an adaptation of development opportunities to the specific characteristics of a particular region. Thus, the diversity of regions is not ignored and is even regarded as a development potential (EC, 2008). Despite the awareness of the unique position and inner structure of each territory (notwithstanding its delimitation), common territorial priorities for the development of the EU have been established by the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020. From a planning perspective, territorial priorities reflect challenges for territorial development that cover a wide range of fields of interest (from demographic and social challenges to environmental risks and climate change). Consequently, the list of territorial priorities is very complex as well. “Balanced spatial development” is seen as a key element of territorial cohesion and is predominantly associated with the structure of urban systems.

The promotion of “polycentric development” is therefore crucial in terms of avoiding the economic, social and spatial polarisation of human activities (however, supporters of a competitive European territory scenario see polycentric development as a bridging concept of cohesion and competitiveness), although such an assumption lacks empirical verification (Malý, 2016; Veneri and Burgalassi, 2012). On the one hand, the potential of metropolitan areas to generate economic and social prosperity is recognised, and the attractiveness of the largest agglomerations for living, working and investment seems to be unquestionable. On the other hand, territorial cohesion discourse accentuates the complicated position of spatially excluded territories and suggests that “rural, peripheral and sparsely populated territories may need to enhance their accessibility, foster entrepreneurship and build strong local capacities” (EU Ministers responsible for Spatial Development, 2011, p. 7). Realising the importance of “territorial cooperation”, territorial priorities include improvement of “spatial connections” (i.e. transport networks, communication technologies and infrastructure, cross-border relations, etc.) and strengthening “local

¹ In addition to “Europe in Balance” and “Competitive Europe” storylines, Waterhout (2007) also recognises the narratives of “Coherent European Policy” and “Green and Clean Europe”.

economies". Achieving territorial cohesion should also respect ecological and natural values. In this regard, "protection of ecological systems" is also territorial priority.

Territorial priorities defined by the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 should not be viewed as isolated goals. By linking them to strategy Europe 2020, Böhme et al. (2011) identify five territorial keys that can be understood as crucial issues promoted by the territorial cohesion concept: accessibility, SGEI, territorial capacities/endowments/assets, city networking, and functional regions. Based on territorial priorities it can be argued that urban systems and their functioning play a key role in spatial development. Due to the extent of the EU in terms of land area, territorial cohesion is characterized by strong scale-dependency. In the context of urban systems, the role of cities/towns is partially determined by the geographical level at which they act as centres. Nevertheless, according to the concept of polycentricity, centrality stems from nodal positions within the urban network and connections to other localities, irrespective of scale level. Access to centres is thus an essential factor when trying to improve living conditions in disadvantaged areas and to achieve more territorial cohesion (e.g. efficient public transport connecting rural municipalities to local towns, highway networks ensuring relations between regional capitals, or accessibility of the largest metropolitan regions by air transport). Besides transportation accessibility to centres (provision of SGEI and jobs), focus is put on easy access to communication services (broadband, mobile telecommunication) and energy networks.

The principles of territorial cohesion are not ground-breaking. The promotion of balanced spatial development in order to reduce territorial disparities and more evenly distribute economic activities is deeply rooted in European policies. Interest in regional planning at the European level had begun to emerge during the second half of the 1960s. The formation of regional policy and the beginnings of any actual applied principles of cohesion policy, however, can be dated to the 1970s. The establishment of a common regional policy partly related to the implementation of the Common Market, which was unable to balance the differences between regions, and partly to reducing economic disparities before the planned single currency project (George, 1996). With growing inter-regional inequalities due to the expanding membership base of the EU (mainly the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe), European spatial development has been seen as increasingly important. In the late 1990s, the principles of territorial cohesion began to form during the process of preparing the European Spatial Development Perspective. The promoted model, however, did not represent an innovative strategy in the context of spatial planning. Rather it was inspired by "l'aménagement du territoire", a French tradition of spatial planning (Faludi, 2004). 'L'aménagement du territoire' was developed as a strategic spatial framework designed for eventual intervention by the public administration and was based primarily on a regional economic approach to spatial development (Faludi, 2009). Economic changes in France in the 1960s (partially caused by the loss of the French colonial markets and the lowering of trade barriers within the European Economic Community), the increasing economic domination of Paris (at the expense of most other French regions) and consequently growing differences between the major cities and especially rural regions, were the main factors in adopting l'aménagement du territoire (Burnham, 1999). France, at that time a centrally-

governed state, started to apply the policy of balanced spatial development with regard to geographical and social conditions in particular regions.

The concept of territorial cohesion (as well as l'aménagement du territoire) emphasizes the development of disadvantaged areas or territories lagging behind. By supporting equal access to SGEI and jobs, the territorial cohesion policy applies the European social model to spatial planning strategies. Access to SGEI and jobs should be ensured for all citizens irrespective of where they live. Location of residence, economic and social activities and relations between them, are in themselves preconditions for a certain level of territorial cohesion. Thus, the spatiality of everyday human lives is closely linked to general welfare and social status. Promoting territorial cohesion adds a spatial justice dimension to European spatial policy (Davoudi, 2005). It seems that thinking about space has been evolving from economic and technical perceptions of space as a container to a recognition of spatial and social causality, something that Soja (1980) called the socio-spatial dialectic. From the perspective of critical geographies, however, the current political and economic organisation of European space is one of the factors of spatial injustice. In contrast to territorial cohesion discourse, the epistemological concept of spatial justice in itself represents one of the critiques of capitalist economies. But in fact, no matter how truly socially motivated the promotion of territorial cohesion is, the aspect of social solidarity has become an integral part of EU spatial policy.

2.2 Territorial cohesion in socialist planning doctrines up to the 1990s

Socialism can be regarded as a general term for a specific socio-economic and political structure that orders many aspects of societal functioning. Single-party political systems, strong ideological anchoring, state ownership of the means of production (land included), rejection of market principles and a wide preference for collective interests – these are some of the distinctive characteristics of socialist regimes (Musil, 2001; Nedovic-Budic, 2001), when compared with capitalist societies in the period after WW II. In spite of such unifying symptoms of socialist order, however, there were numerous types of socialist societies, a variety of socialist frameworks stemming from specific historical legacies of the pre-socialist periods and from different adaptations of ideological premises to local milieu (Hamilton, 1976). As Musil (2001) points out, the socialist transformation was implemented in countries differing in terms of economic and urban structures, political institutions and cultural models.

The seemingly homogenous space of socialist countries has thus to be grouped into several categories, enabling a proper description of applied planning strategies. Firstly, we can recognize the category of Central East European socialist countries, including East Germany and the former Czechoslovakia, i.e. regions with relatively high levels of pre-socialist industrialisation and urbanisation, as well as Poland and Hungary, representing countries with a heritage of deeper regional disparities. The second distinct group covers the agrarian or semi-agrarian socialist states of south-eastern Europe, including Romania, Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia. The Soviet Union and the non-European, predominantly developing socialist countries, can be further distinguished as a third or even a fourth category within the outlined classification (Dingsdale, 1999;

Musil, 2001; Sokol, 2001). The research interest here will focus mainly on the category of Central Eastern Europe, but still respecting the strong influence of political and planning paradigms emerging from the Soviet space during the post-war period.

The political systems under the socialist regimes were tightly coupled with the economic and social ones. The interconnectedness was visible in particular in socialist industrialisation which played the important ideological role of a flagship project, introducing not only economic but, at the same time, also social modernisation (Mareš, 1988). It was precisely this strong ideological dimension that made socialist industrialisation so different from other types of industrialisation processes (Szczepański and Furdyna, 1977). Socialist industrialisation was controlled through a strongly hierarchical central command planning system. The national economic strategy defined the basic framework for developing more specific policies for various sectors, and long- and middle-term economic priorities were set up on these decision-making levels to reflect the needs of the national economy as a whole (Hoffmann, 1994; Nedovic-Budic, 2001). The regional policies were generally given a lower priority, at least in the first two decades of socialist industrialisation, which was understood as a comprehensive universal tool diminishing existing regional disparities. Regional plans were formulated as rather auxiliary documents channelling the geographical distribution of nationally-defined planning targets (Enyedi, 1990). The top-level regional documents took the form of urbanisation strategies, which detailed physical arrangements at the nation-wide scale. Their effective design and scope followed to some extent historical legacies and national settlement specificities in their respective countries, as well as the modifications of political regimes since 1940s.

We can recognize several distinct phases of socialist industrialisation, having different impacts in terms of territorial interdependencies and regional disparities (Szczepański and Furdyna, 1977). During the period immediately after WW II and further into 1950s, the major effort was to restore national economies (Malík, 1976). The onset of industrialisation followed the Soviet heavy-industrialisation model, which was not accompanied by specific urbanisation strategies (Enyedi, 1996; Musil, 2001). The discourse of territorial cohesion was embedded primarily at the national scale, echoing the proclaimed equity between industrialisation and socio-economic modernisation. There was an ideologically-supported aim to develop new socialist industry outside of the traditional capitalist industrial cores, and accordingly some investments were allocated to less developed, more agrarian regions. Nonetheless, the bulk of industrial production remained stabilised in the pre-socialist locations in order not to weaken overall national economic output, manifesting the contradiction between the de-concentrating appeal of ideological visions and the agglomerating nature of economically-driven politics (Musil, 2002).

In the case of Czechoslovakia, substantial political attention was paid to diminish the long-standing economic gap between the Czech lands and the Slovak territories, as well as between the northern and southern parts of the Czech lands. The displacement of the original German populations resulted in the need to repopulate peripheral regions of the country (Illner and Andrlé, 1994). These issues were viewed as ad hoc planning assignments and not set into any wider planning concept. Musil (2001) summarises the planning

discourse at the time as driven only by economic strategies, applying centralised distributive tools in rather extensive ways while ignoring regional feedbacks.

From the early 1960s the discrepancies between industrialisation strategies and regional policies became the subject of deeper planning interest, as they caused problems both in terms of economic development and in terms of social cohesion. The territorial distribution of new industrial premises, for example, often did not correspond to the potential of local/regional labour markets (Mareš, 1988), resulting in a lack of the required labour force, long-distance commuting to work and emerging demographic imbalances in some industrial centres. Especially in the case of Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the spatial concentration of industry outpaced the tempo of the concentration of population, and this developed indirect urbanisation strongly and complicated the rational distribution of (non-industrial) resources (Musil and Link, 1976). Planning attention thus turned towards urbanisation strategies, promising to set up an optimal equilibrium between economic effectiveness and social goals.

The assignment for such goals can be cited from the Czechoslovak period analytical document: “The basic task of our settlement regulation is to work out how to distribute effectively housing and amenities development in the context of a too scattered settlement structure and how to, at the same time, reach the optimal settlement standards for all inhabitants within the national territory. The only solution is to establish a network of economic, social and cultural centres within the settlement system which will be well accessible on a daily basis, providing economic conditions for the concentration of population. We have to locate new housing and amenities development in these centres.” (Palla et al., 1962, p. 22). The first generation of these urbanisation concepts was developed in Czechoslovakia and Hungary during late 1960s and 1970s, theoretically based on Christaller’s Central Place Theory (Ryšavý et al., 1992). They transferred the cohesion discourse from the national to a regional level, and at the same time they refused the political concept of cities as spatial containers for industrial production. Instead, urbanism was put back into the game through taking broader non-productive and service urban functions into account (Enyedi, 1996; Szelenyi, 1996; Wu, 2003). This approach of “decentralised concentration” (Malík et al., 1968) established the basic territorial framework for the centrally-planned allocation of investments.

The delimited network of centres was normative and, to certain extent, utopian in nature. But by the middle of the 1970s, spontaneous processes had started to change the normatively-given spatial pattern of centres in a significant way (Musil, 2001). Many centres were developing more slowly than intended. In contrast, the hinterlands of some regional centres rapidly strengthened their positions within the national settlement systems. The criticisms of the central-place settlement system came from economic standpoints, together with more realistic analyses of urban processes, and set the stage for the birth of conceptually new urbanisation strategies. These concepts took into account the existence of spontaneous urbanisation processes, as well as the economic and demographic importance of emerging city regions and metropolitan areas (Musil, 2002). City regions (urban agglomerations) represented qualitatively new spatial units within the planning doctrines of those times. They were complex territories integrated through economic, social and transportation linkages, requiring qualitatively new

definitions of cohesive territorial arrangements. Accepting the ‘universal’ nature of urbanisation processes, the socialist planning doctrines were weakened in their normative stance. The detailed physical planning approach was slightly re-oriented towards the employment of more integrated spatial planning tools. The delimitation of “preferred urbanisation axes” and “integrated urbanised areas” (Sulkiewicz et al., 1981) contextualised the cohesion concept in a more relational way.

2.3 Comparative scheme

Territorial cohesion discourses are primarily contextualized by political and economic systems and by their instances in certain periods of time. While EU spatial development strategies have evolved in democratic societies characterised by a free market environment and the rapid qualitative increase of communication technologies and overall individual mobility, the previous socialist planning approach was based on a totally different political regime, characterised by strong central governance and a limited role for local authorities in spatial planning processes. With respect to the territorial cohesion concept, however, the normative principles of contemporary European spatial planning policy and those of socialist planning doctrines exhibit similar features concerning the aims and priorities of cohesive spatial development. Although there were different underlying ‘*raison d’être*’ for the spatialisation of socio-economic political narratives, the idea of balanced spatial development represents the common aspect of both planning approaches: the excessive concentration of (economic) activities should be counterweighed by the development of lagging areas that are disadvantaged in terms of access to resources. The principle of socio-spatial solidarity is thus embedded in both planning doctrines as a way towards a more just or effectively a more balanced spatial arrangement.

From a spatial planning perspective, the political goal of balanced spatial development is achieved via specific interventions into the functioning of a settlement system, attempting to counterbalance the uneven distribution of resources. The planning action is thus oriented mainly toward the support of the settlements centres outside of the economically most advanced areas. Generally, small and medium-sized towns are frequent objects of planning interventions in order to create a stable network of centres which would ensure the efficient use of their strengths, through coordinated cooperation (EC, 2008). According to EU spatial policy, cooperation between regional and local centres by the sharing of functions and provisioning of services contributes to less territorial concentration and more balanced development (EC, 2007a). Similarly, socialist central planning emphasised the role of centres in which basic public amenities are concentrated and where residents of particular hinterlands can satisfy their claims and rights to education, health care, social care, etc. (Musil, 2001). These centres should be spatially distributed as evenly as possible. In spite of distinctive urban system theories which serve as a framework for settings of spatial planning strategies and the delimitation of centres (see the empirical part of this work, below), a focus on daily-based access to services and jobs characterises both planning traditions.

There is a strong de-concentration bias underlying the normative discourse of contemporary European spatial planning, as well as in the ideologically-framed socialist doctrines. Planned de-concentration, however,

often conflicts with the more spontaneous concentrative nature of many social and economic processes. Although de-concentration of economic activities is one of the main aims of current EU territorial cohesion policy, the impact of metropolitan regions in terms of global competitiveness and their role in economic development is considered as crucial (EU Ministers responsible for Spatial Development, 2011). Highly-urbanised areas enjoy agglomeration economies, the advantages of clustering particular activities, easier access to higher education and health or social care facilities, etc. Consequently, “this is reflected in the high level of GDP per head, productivity, employment and research and innovation activity relative to the national average in capital cities and in most other densely populated conurbations” (EC, 2008, p. 5). Under socialist central planning policy, metropolitan and suburban processes were limited due to the equalising and regulatory approach to spatial development (Hampl, 2005). Even such a strongly restrictive planning strategy, however, was not able to hide the specific functioning of the largest urban areas. Reflecting the strength of regional agglomerations, socialist planners realised the imperfection of administrative spatial boundaries and the importance of complex territorial frameworks including broader spatial relations. Thus, the concentration of people and economic activities into growth poles (especially industrial agglomerations) gained its conceptual utilisation, leading to an increasing focus on highly urbanised areas (Musil, 2001). A certain duality in the planning paradigms spanning between concentration and de-concentration benefits, can be thus pointed out as a feature inherent in both doctrines under study.

2.4 Case study methodology

Having compared socialist and contemporary territorial cohesion discourses, we can argue that they share significant common features. The similarities can be found mainly in the spatio-political normative narratives framing the planning goals. What still remains unclear, however, is the extent to which these narratives are (and were) reflected in analytical practices of spatial planning. The current principles of EU spatial policy are translated into national spatial development strategies and planning tools. In the Czech Republic, the empirical focus of this paper, the form of spatial planning documents follows the hierarchy of particular administrative territorial units. The EU territorial cohesion priorities are taken into account in the Spatial Development Policy of the Czech Republic: “... a planning tool that sets up requirements and frameworks for detailed specification of planning tasks” (MMR, 2015a, p. 11). As a national document, the Spatial Development Policy concerns the issues of cohesion at a rather general level, particularly accenting the integrated development of cities and regions (reflecting spontaneous concentrative processes within metropolitan areas), as well as the polycentric organisation of the settlement system (reflecting the normatively-defined goal of balanced spatial development). The general framework set by the Spatial Development Policy is developed into more concrete goals and measures by the Spatial Development Principles. This is the spatial planning document at the regional level and it must respect the Spatial Development Policy in order to ensure the vertically-binding interconnection of spatial planning documents. These documents (together with ad hoc studies of regional settlement structure) provide the information about analytical procedures that are based on the discourse on territorial cohesion.

Correspondingly, socialist documents on spatial development serve as the source for understanding the practical application of socialist central planning principles. The structure of the historical planning documents under study is analogous, in many ways, to that of the contemporary materials. The documents produced by the state Research Institute of Construction and Architecture were examined to interpret knowledge of planning measures at the national scale. The document “Principles and Standards of Physical Planning” (VÚVA, 1979) played the role of an historical counterpart to the contemporary Spatial Development Policy document. Analogically, the Physical Plan of the Brno Settlement Regional Agglomeration (Terplan, 1985) provided information concerning reflections of socialist national-wide policies in this specific regional context.

Reviewing spatial planning documents, comparing analytical approaches and their impact on the spatial arrangements of territories, this empirical study reveals the parallels and dissimilarities of EU and socialist spatial planning. The starting point for the empirical analysis deals with the national-scale level, in an effort to compare patterns of normatively-defined territories, where intensive development is (was) expected to take place. The first step in the analysis is based on the planning policies coping with concentration processes. We argue, that the socialist map of “growth poles” (urban regional agglomerations) is very similar to the contemporary normative delimitation of metropolitan regions. The (dis)similarity of policies intended

to even out spatial imbalances is examined at the regional level in the second stage of this empirical analysis. This stage follows the normatively-planned de-concentration measures. Because the lower hierarchical level was crucial for the application of socialist de-concentration policies, the study region (namely the South Moravian Region – NUTS3) was established as the basic spatial unit for this part of the study. It was selected primarily due to the structure of its settlement system, including a variety of centres in terms of population size and economic importance, and hence it serves as a relevant model when describing urban hierarchies. The planned structures of the urban centres in the 1980s and the situation at present can now be compared.

The South Moravian Region is situated in the south-eastern part of the country and is characterised by high economic potential, especially given by the strong position of its regional capital Brno in the national economy (see Fig. 1). Moreover, its strategic location stems from its proximity to the metropolitan regions of Prague, Vienna and Bratislava. Regarding the spatial relations and functioning of its settlement system, Brno plays a key role as the administrative, economic and cultural centre of the region (Mulíček and Toušek, 2004; Kunc et al., 2012). The importance of Brno (380,000 inhabitants) is further increased by the relatively small sizes of other centres (approximately 35,000 inhabitants of the second largest city Znojmo), and its central position with reference to spatial context and routing of transport infrastructure (Kraft et al., 2014).

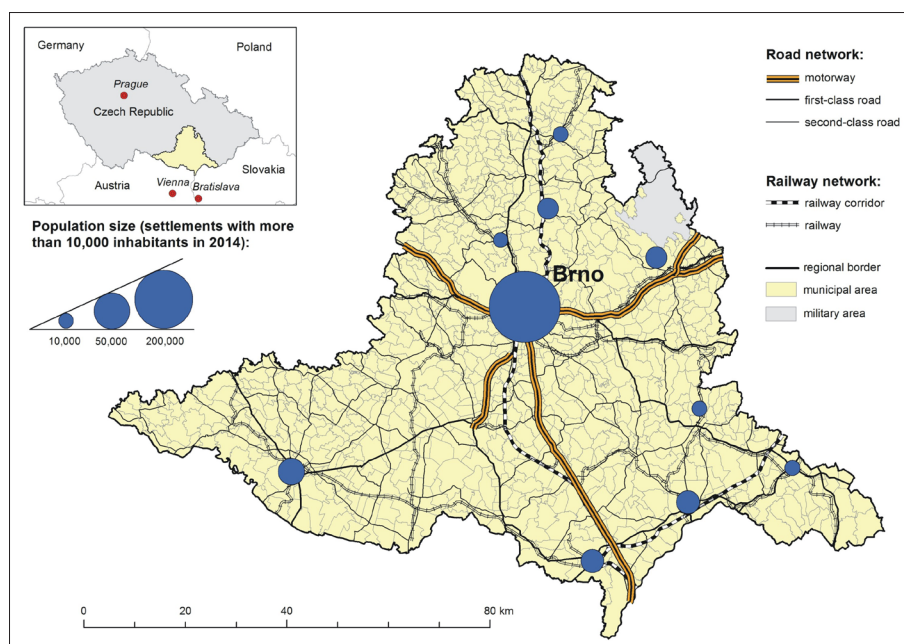


Fig. 1: Geographical location of the South Moravian Region. Source: ČSÚ (2014); authors' elaboration

3. Empirical analysis and findings

3.1 National level – urban regional agglomerations and the metropolitan areas

Socialist urbanisation strategies were characterised by a continuous evolution of the normative approaches to spatial development. The first theoretically-based conceptions were questioned and modified by approaches emphasising spontaneous urban processes and the importance of highly-urbanised areas. With respect to analytical planning practices, the goal of decentralised concentration was initially expressed by the so-called “central settlement system”. The insufficient

ability of the central settlement system to react to natural urban processes gave rise to strategies taking into account relatively spontaneous concentrative metropolitan processes. In order to regulate these urbanisation trends, urban regional agglomerations were delimited at the national planning level. They were conceptualised from the late 1970s as the elementary backbones of the national settlement system. The spatial delimitation of urban regional agglomerations is depicted, together with the metropolitan regions which were delimited as the target areas of integrated territorial investments (with respect to integrated development territorial plans), in 2014 (see Fig. 2).

Despite the long historical gap in development (these two distinct layers of metropolitan regions/agglomerations are almost 40 years distant from each other), there are just minor changes of overall geographic pattern. The number of delimited metropolitan regions is slightly higher in 2014 when compared with the 1976 proposal, as the Northern Bohemia urbanised belt was divided into two polycentric metropolitan regions and the Mladá Boleslav region emerged driven by the presence of a strong economic actor (Škoda Auto). Having accounted for the changes in spatial extent (which are sizable in the case of some metropolitan regions when compared to the socialist proposal), no other major structural variances which would distinguish the geographic logic of both delimitations are observed.

The question then is how much the similarity of spatial patterns stems from the affinity of socialist and contemporary planning discourses. The urban regional agglomerations were delimited during the 1970s as a kind of planning response to the gradual and rather spontaneous emergence of complicated inter-urban relations in the hinterlands of large Czech cities. These territories emerged from the traditional conceptualisation of local daily-urban systems organised through flows-to-work in secondary sectors. The VÚVA period analytical documents (1979) point out the functional division of labour developing between particular towns and municipalities within agglomerations. In particular, the rise of employment in the tertiary sector in metropolitan cores formed a qualitatively new spatial configuration. The analytical and planning discourse thus had to shift from quantitative urbanisation issues towards a more integrative approach able to grasp the functional diversity of urban regional agglomerations.

The socialist integration discourse was different from contemporary concepts of integrative planning, however. It understood agglomerations as urban systems with an internal hierarchy of particular centres and municipalities. Different functions and development strategies were normatively assigned to them in order to reach a desirable development of the agglomeration as a whole. Although there were several proclaimed targets of planning measures (among them environmental, infrastructural and facilities issues), the coordination of economic and housing policies was of the highest priority. As the extent of sprawling suburbanisation was restricted during socialism, the spatial balance between normatively allocated production and housing functions was one of the most important planning goals within urban regional agglomerations.

The political and planning narratives at the base of the delimitation of present-day metropolitan regions differ in terms of scale. In contrast to the situation in the 1970s, there is a strong embeddedness of national planning actions in European political discourse. Re-territorialisation, as well as the re-scaling of regional policies and planning measures, have become emerging issues within this discourse (MMR, 2015b). Bearing in mind the socio-economic significance of European metropolitan regions, it is not surprising that urban/metropolitan dimensions receive the foreground of planning attention. Thirteen metropolitan regions were identified in the Czech Republic in 2014, ordered in two hierarchical levels – the metropolitan areas of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), and urban agglomerations of Integrated Plans of Territorial Development (IPRU). As mentioned above, the ‘top-down’ delimitation of socialist

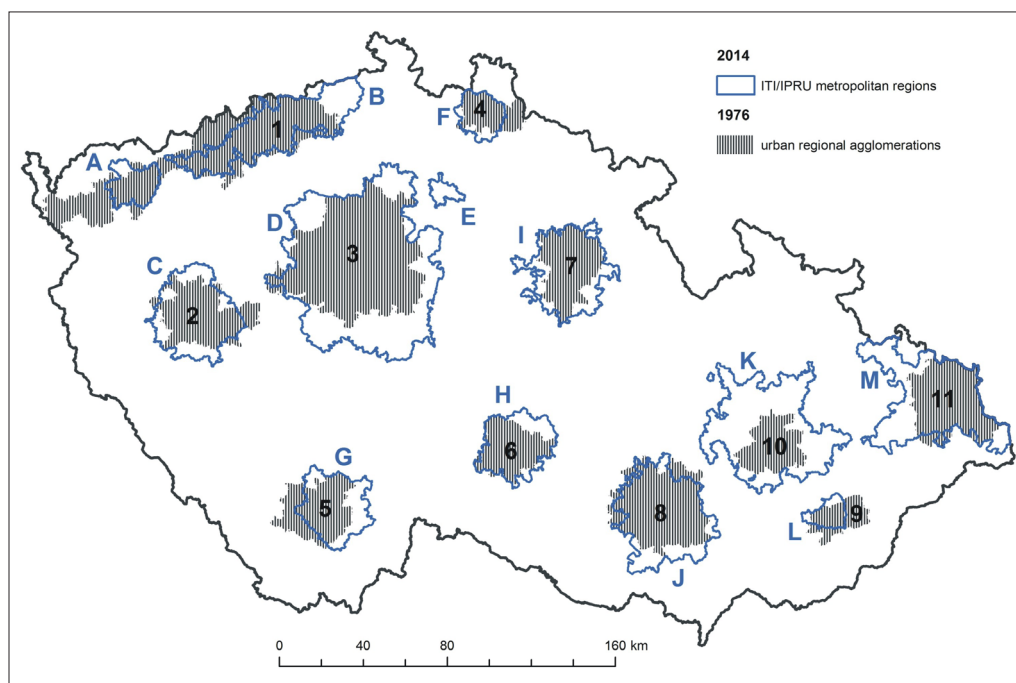


Fig. 2: Comparison of urban regional agglomerations (URA)^a delimited in 1976 and ITI/IPRU metropolitan regions (MR)^b delimited in 2014

Sources: VÚVA (1979), MMR (2015b); authors' elaboration

^a1 – Northern Bohemia URA, 2 – Plzeň URA, 3 – Prague URA, 4 – Liberec URA, 5 – České Budějovice URA, 6 – Jihlava URA, 7 – Hradec Králové/Pardubice URA, 8 – Brno URA, 9 – Gottwaldov (Zlín) URA, 10 – Olomouc URA, 11 – Ostrava URA

^bA – Karlovy Vary MR, B – Ústí nad Labem/Chomutov MR, C – Plzeň MR, D – Prague MR, E – Mladá Boleslav MR, F – Liberec MR, G – České Budějovice MR, H – Jihlava MR, I – Hradec Králové/Pardubice MR, J – Brno MR, K – Olomouc MR, L – Zlín MR, M – Ostrava MR

urban regional agglomerations is similar to the rather 'bottom-up' delimitation (there was no binding national methodology), managed at the regional scale.

Disregarding the internal hierarchy, these metropolitan regions coincide with socialist urban regional agglomerations not only in terms of spatial delimitation but also in terms of political grounding. Just as in Czechoslovakian socialist planning discourse, they represent shifting scale, singularities emanating from existing spatial planning categories; they are proposed as the areas where integrated planning tools are to be applied, joining sector-based planning measures and financial schemes under a single strategic framework. The strategic documents giving reasons for the purpose of individual metropolitan regions employ concepts and issues highly comparable with socialist narratives. They respect the extraordinary (economic) position of urban cores, as well as the transforming nature of secondary metropolitan centres. Contemporary metropolitan plans, however, do not attempt to prescribe fixed functions to the metropolitan centres, as the initial ethos of socialist planning was substituted by a more networked and participatory approach. The metropolitan areas were considered in both periods under study as growth poles, where special planning measures had to be employed in order to ensure economic performance and, at the same time, internal coherence.

3.2 Regional level – urban centres

Besides realising natural concentrative tendencies, socialist nation-wide spatial policies applied the approach of “decentralised concentration”, relevant especially at lower hierarchical levels. At the regional level, a strictly normative approach to delimitations of centres (the initial definition of the central settlement system from the 1960s) was relaxed in the 1980s. Although the places of concentration of human and economic resources were still seen as growth poles, their potential to generate economic profit was tightly connected to their specific spatial, economic and social advantages supporting concentration tendencies (Terplan, 1981). As a result, the revised concept of the socialist settlement system was based on the delimitation of a hierarchical settlement system reflecting the main functions of potential centres and the broader spatial context.

In the 1980s, centres were defined by using information about a settlement's functions and its regional significance (Terplan, 1985). The importance of centres was generally based on two indicators. The primary characteristic concerned the main types of residential, job and service functions. The second and rather additional indicator assessed the regional significance of centres by comparing the size of its respective micro-regions. A criterion of minimum functional size was adopted to determine settlement centres. In some relevant cases, a centre was represented by the organic integrity of more than one municipality. In other words, intensive mutual relations between settlement centres, expressed by mutual work commuting flows, served as a supplementary indicator to determine the final list of 338 centres (from 7,511 municipalities in 1970) at the national level, and 43 centres in the case of the South Moravian Region (in its present delimitation).

Using the two previously-mentioned indicators, the defined centres were divided into four main categories (see Tab. 1). The first category (A) represents basic settlement centres characterised by a low frequency of units and a large inner differentiation of the significance of centres. Besides the capital Prague, which is the only macro-regional centre, this category includes meso-regional centres with distinctive levels of significance. Basic settlement centres are predominantly centres and other larger settlements of the highest-level administrative units – regions – in their former delimitation. Secondary settlement centres (B) are micro-regional centres with relatively great importance for their hinterlands. Supplementary settlement centres (C) are micro-regional centres typified by looser relations between functions of centres and their regional significance and by more variability in a centre's development potential. Spatial context and other features concerning position within the settlement system are important for planning intentions. Other settlement centres (D) play the role of sub-regional centres with local significance.

With respect to the principles of the current territorial cohesion policy, the basis for regional spatial planning policies in the Czech Republic is represented by the Spatial Development Principles (USB, 2015) and the Territorial Study of Settlement Structure (UAD Studio, 2014). In

Category	Settlement centres	Hierarchical level	Sub-categories	Number (SMR)
A	Basic	Macro-regional	A	0
			A1 strong	1
			A2 medium	0
			A3 weak	0
B	Secondary	Micro-regional	B1 very strong	0
			B2 strong	1
			B3 medium strong	2
C	Supplementary	Micro-regional	C1 medium	2
			C2 weak	4
			C3 very weak	10
D	Other	Sub-regional	D	23
Sum				43

Tab. 1: Categories of centres based on their function and regional significance (in 1985) and their presence in the South Moravian Region (SMR)

Source: Terplan (1985); authors' calculations

the case of the South Moravian Region, a municipality with production and service potential is understood as a centre (UAD Studio, 2014). Centrality is thus determined essentially by potential job opportunities, causing work in-commuting flows, and by the potential of service functions affecting in-commuting flows in terms of different types of services (retail, cultural facilities, social care, health care, administrative functions, etc.). Moreover, the importance of residential functions is also considered. Nevertheless, a purely quantitative approach including evaluation of the occurrence and prevalence of specific types of services or functions is not applied. Besides quantitative indicators (static and dynamic), settlement context and the embeddedness of a specific centre in broader functional relationships are taken into account.

Focusing on the delimitation made in 2014, the final number of centres in the South Moravian region is 54 (from 647 municipalities). The regional capital Brno is identified as a supra-regional centre (the only one in the region). Then, there are regional centres, sub-regional centres, micro-regional centres, and local centres (see Tab. 2). The hierarchical categorisation is complemented by the positional typology of each centre, however. In this context, a centre could be the core of Brno metropolitan region (BMR), situated within BMR (strict and looser delimitation), part of another agglomeration, networked with other centres, autonomous, or a periphery centre.

In general, methodological approaches to the delimitation of centres in both time periods show similar features. Primarily, both analyses are based on quantitative methodology concerning jobs and the services and residential functions of municipalities. Although this could result from the limited availability of municipal data, the focus on jobs and service functions is a traditional way to identify settlement centres. Secondly, the position and significance of centres within the settlement system is based on horizontal linkages and the potential integrity of particular territories. But, in fact, emphasising the importance of relational aspects with regard to the identification of centres is a typical concern of current analytical approaches. Thirdly, although the comparison of results could be problematic due to different scales and methods employed in both analyses, the distribution pattern

of centres varies to a smaller extent and the main centres preserve their importance (see Fig. 3). The categories of centres determined in 1985 have been assigned to the nine categories created in 2014. A regional analysis from 2014, however, defines a large number of categories and thus the comparison should not be overestimated. It serves especially as a graphical visualisation and summary of the principal outcomes of the empirical investigation.

4. Discussion and conclusions

This paper examined territorial cohesion discourses characteristic for spatial planning doctrines in two historically distinctive periods of time. Comparing the current territorial cohesion concept pervading EU Cohesion policy and the spatial planning strategies at lower geographical (administrative) levels with socialist planning doctrine in the Czech Republic, the work reveals remarkable similarities not only in the spatio-political normative narratives but also in analytical practices of spatial planning mechanisms. In spite of ideological contradictions between both spatial planning doctrines emphasising social solidarity within spatial contexts, there is a shared principle of spatial development strategies. Uneven development is thus understood as a consequence in part of spatial inequalities resulting from various levels of territorial potential. Such a common ground is essential for the subsequent interpretation of particular narratives and analytical procedures.

The EU territorial cohesion concept could be understood as a political goal and also as a tool designed to ensure 'spatial' solidarity across the EU territory. Despite several attempts to clarify the concept (e.g. Faludi, 2004; Servillo, 2010), its multidimensional character does not allow a simple definition. The abstract meaning of the concept becomes clearer when territorial cohesion is reflected in spatial planning strategies and the structure of urban systems is questioned. In that case, supporting small and medium-sized towns as local centres, as well as metropolitan regions as growth poles of the EU and national economies, is a typical practical application of the territorial cohesion concept. Natural concentration processes increase the importance of the largest agglomerations while peripheral

Category	Settlement centres (hierarchical level)	Sub-categories	Number (SMR)	Positional typology*	Category (1985 delimitation)
1	Supra-regional	–	1	a	A1
2	Regional	I.	1	f	B2
3		II.	6	f	B3
4	Sub-regional	I.	6	b, c, f	C1
5		II.	6	c, e, f	C2
6	Micro-regional	I.	9	a, c, d, e, f	C3
7		II.	8	c, d, f, g	D
8	Local	I.	12	b, c, d, f, g	D
9		II.	5	b, c, d, f	D
Sum			54		

Tab. 2: Categories of centres based on production and service potential (in 2014) and their presence in the South Moravian Region (SMR). Source: UAD Studio (2014); authors' calculations

Note: *a = the core of the Brno Metropolitan Region (BMR); b = within BMR (strict delimitation); c = within BMR (looser delimitation); d = part of other agglomeration; e = networked with other centres; f = autonomous; g = periphery centre

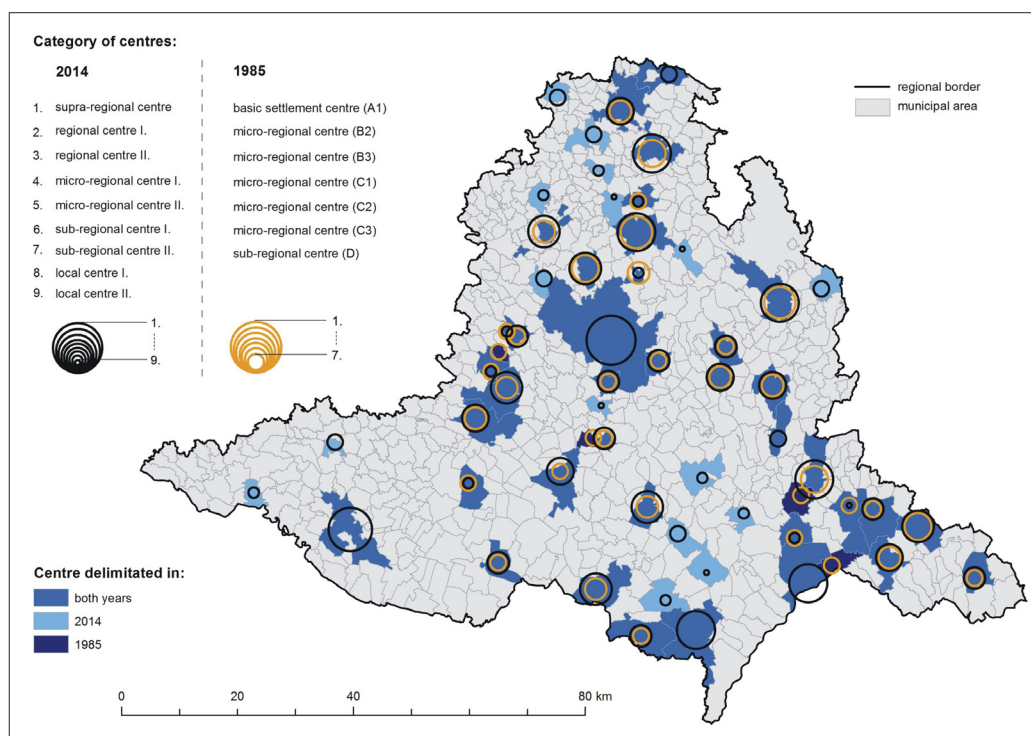


Fig. 3: Delimitation of settlement centres in the South Moravian Region by UAD Studio in 2014 and Terplan in 1985
Sources: UAD Studio (2014), Terplan (1985); authors' elaboration

localities experience dramatic losses of population and economic power. A territorial cohesion policy aims at overcoming territorial disparities by finding solutions to the adverse situations of disadvantaged regions (EC, 2008). Similarly, the goal of socialist central planning was to eliminate economic and social disparities between cities and rural areas (Malík, 1976). The issue of spontaneous concentration (or de-concentration) processes was purposely mitigated (and ignored) in the initial phase of the socialist period in Czechoslovakia. To a certain extent, however, the 'failure' of the central settlement system approach enabled the formation of a more complex and integrated approach to spatial development. The realisation of the economic significance and specific functioning of urban regional agglomerations was a first step to modify the previous strict normative planning strategy into a more contextualised approach, respecting the distinctive qualitative nature of specific spatial units. Thus, both territorial cohesion discourses are characterized by a relatively substantial concentration/de-concentration duality.

Reviewing the analytical procedures and outcomes of both spatial planning doctrines we can argue that spatial pattern of agglomerations/metropolitan areas in the Czech Republic has not changed in a significant way. Nevertheless, the socialist approach was based on a slightly different understanding of urban agglomerations: although an agglomeration consisted of several spatial units, linkages between them were planned as vertical policies with the focus on coordination of economic development and housing. On the other hand, the current delimitation of ITI metropolitan regions respects increasing de-concentration processes, the functional specialisation of secondary centres emerging in mutual horizontal linkages between the spatial units, and the growing importance of the core city or entire metropolitan region for more distant municipalities (i.e. the larger area of ITI metropolitan regions as a consequence). Regardless of distinct internal processes, metropolitan areas are seen as specific spaces (territories

in EU rhetoric) with great impacts on national (European) development, especially in terms of economic prosperity, and as units exceeding traditional administrative boundaries and requiring integrated planning tools.

Information about the analytical elaboration of the normatively-defined goal of supporting small and medium-sized towns is provided by the delimitation of centres at the regional level. The socialist delimitation worked with the absolute importance of centres (defined by jobs, service and residential functions), and the broader context including relations with surrounding municipalities played only a supporting role. Greater emphasis is put on the capability of centres to create their own catchment areas in the current delimitation. Due to the enormous stability of settlement systems, however, and despite transformation processes in the Czech Republic in the 1990s, the outcomes of both delimitations show a considerable degree of accordance. With regard to the type of centres in terms of their functions and desired (planned) development, any contradictory distinction between socialist and current spatial planning is mainly based on related economic systems and modes of production.

In the case of centres located in peripheral and rural areas, socialist planners accentuated agricultural functions with a strictly defined hierarchy depending on specific localisation related to agricultural land and potential consumption. The development of other centres was closely linked with industrialisation and agricultural mass production (Malík, 1976). Today, the centrality of peripheral centres is related to a broader spectrum of functions and activities and is more dependent on the position of the centre within the urban network.

In terms of spatial planning policies, the territorial cohesion concept does not represent a completely new spatial planning strategy, at least in the former socialist countries and especially in the Czech Republic. In spite

of different ideological backgrounds, planned balanced spatial development is typical for both territorial cohesion discourses. As a common objective, spontaneous concentration processes should be counterbalanced by the growing prosperity of peripheral and rural regions. While socialist policies aimed at ensuring prosperity by direct investments in the production functions in central settlements, current EU regional policy intends to enhance the adverse situations of peripheral areas by strengthening local entrepreneurship, especially through the investments in the form of subsidies from the EU structural funds. The centralist top-down approach of socialist spatial planning has been replaced by a more decentralised system, characterised by a certain level of autonomous decisions concerning the spatial development of particular territories and a more limited power of the state apparatus. In contrast with the socialist regime, contemporary spatial planning policy is applied within a distinctive socio-economic context: a free market environment; intensive mobility; international trade; and globalisation influences. In this matter, the EU goal of territorial cohesion seems to play the role of a socially-motivated 'rescuer' of areas not profiting from the capitalist economic system. As natural concentration processes continue, however, with the increasing importance of the largest agglomerations and metropolitan regions projected in the support of growth poles (ITI), one can seriously doubt improved cohesion for the most disadvantaged areas. This leads us to essential questions concerning the functioning mechanisms of a capitalist economy tightly connected to the concentration of wealth, production or even ideas into a relatively small number of key development centres.

Learning from the mistakes of socialist spatial planning associated mainly with the partial ignoring of regional and local specificities, current European spatial planning policies should be aware of the problems related to the strict following of normative concepts and grand narratives. Urbanisation processes emerge in a rather natural (or at least politico-economic) way, and thus spatial planning practices should be based on complex and integrated planning concepts and instruments. Instead of a non-effective application of a normatively-defined spatial redistribution of centres, contemporary territorial cohesion discourse places an emphasis on the advantages resulting from spatial diversity and the particularities of unique localities. Nevertheless, EU territorial cohesion policies build on grand narratives, including access to SGEI, polycentricity, or territorial capital with the purpose of continuous economic prosperity. Territorial cohesion practice should not be limited only to a growth and competitiveness rhetoric, but rather the regional diversities stemming from the varieties of European territories should be brought to the forefront of interest. In the context of the negative historical experiences of the former socialist European countries with central planning mechanisms, skepticism towards top-down spatial planning equalising policies is a legitimate concern. As a multi-scalar and multidimensional concept, territorial cohesion attempts to grasp all of the issues linked with regional development – without a real awareness of the complicated realisation of this task with respect to the site-specific character of spatial inequalities. In this regard, understanding territorial cohesion as a place-based approach, even though it disregards to some extent the complexity of local development and requires different scenarios and practices in different spaces, seems to be a crucial interjection in order to move forward the effectiveness and comprehension of the territorial cohesion concept.

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