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## **BUZZWORDS, CONCEPTS, AND TERRITORIAL IMPLICATIONS IN THE EU. A LOOK AT THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA OF THE EU THROUGH THE YEARS**

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Buzzwords and trends have found fertile ground in the era of the internet. There's little doubt in that. The world wide web is a propagation medium like no other for any topic that gets attention at any moment in time. Is that also true for concepts that may influence the way our world is governed? Are our institutions caught in the vortex of buzzwords and trends? Is the academic world affected as well?

Those are not easy questions to answer and there's no way to cover such a topic in a brief paper like the current one. Nonetheless, the objective here is to tap into the matter by looking at the Territorial Agenda documents that the EU institutions have published in the last two decades and find whether there are any indications that they have any role in such phenomena. To this end, besides the above-mentioned documents, some speciality literature papers that discuss these documents has also been analysed. Still, a definitive conclusion is not reached in this paper.

The birth of the first Territorial Agenda document of the European Union is presented in detail by Faludi [1], a process that took place over several years [1, p. 22] and produced several versions of the document through the work of experts from different countries [1, p. 23, 25]. All the efforts around the development of the Territorial Agenda, but also in previous documents [2], brought two terms to the general attention of researchers from various fields: *territorial cohesion* and *polycentric development*. The focus will fall more on the former than on the latter in this paper.

The terms are continuously present in the Territorial Agenda documents. In the academic world, extensive speciality literature has covered these concepts. Still, the meaning of both terms is rather *blurred*. There are no official EU documents that describe them clearly, so we don't really know what the EU means when it proposes territorial cohesion as a "prerequisite

for achieving sustainable economic growth and implementing social and economic cohesion” [3, p. 3(8)], or suggests to “ensure the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy according to territorial cohesion principles” [4, p. 2(4)], or specifies that territorial cohesion “reinforces solidarity to promote convergence and reduce inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous prospects” [5, p. 3(6)]. Even though, text from various EU documents are seen as definitions of territorial cohesion [6, p. 8], they are not definitions per se.

Though there are ways to measure both polycentric development and territorial cohesion, whether they measure the same thing is up for discussion. For example, the *Report on the Assessment of Territorial Cohesion and the Territorial Agenda 2020 of the European Union* mentions that “[r]egardless of an exact definition of territorial cohesion, different arguments have been put forward to include the objective of territorial cohesion alongside economic and social cohesion” [6, p. 8], showing that sometimes, what is measured as territorial cohesion is what is considered territorial cohesion. On the other hand, Medeiros [7] attempts to provide a methodology to evaluate territorial cohesion, by identifying its dimensions, than various indicators for each of these dimensions, to get, in the end, to a definition. However, there’s heavy reliance on EU documents in the identification of these dimensions.

Critique regarding the lack of clarity of these two terms is ever present. Most studies tackling these concepts start with such a statement which means that they are rather fluid. So, it may be that, to some extent, the meaning in the eye of the “beholder”.

They, obviously, didn’t come out of nowhere. Faludi points out, that the Territorial Agenda documents, and other documents that lead up to them, are the product of the work of experts [1, p. 23]. However, as opposed to the speciality literature, there’s no room in such documents to explain how and why territorial cohesion and polycentric development are central to the development of the territory of the European Union.

The concepts, by themselves, don’t necessarily carry positive implications. As ridiculous as it may sound, a geographical area can be territorially cohesive even if it is entirely environmentally unsustainable. There’s cohesion in that, even if there are no positive aspects in such territorial cohesion. Polycentric development can have both positive and negative implications. For example, polycentric development can mean territorial expansion, which also means that a lot of agricultural territory can be lost to various urban functions. Thus, where something is gained, something else is

lost. Still, if territorial cohesion does not, necessarily, have direct territorial implications, polycentric development can.

Consequently, they feel more like buzzwords that have just caught on and are general enough to allow for a large degree of freedom in the way the member states implement related EU policies in the pursuit of improving the life of EU citizen. And whether that's achieved, can be measured through various metrics that can be continuously evaluated, no matter if we summarise them through concepts such as territorial cohesion, or not.

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