The territorial approach to EU cohesion policy: current issues and evidence from Greece

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The importance attributed to the territorial dimension of the European Union cohesion policy steadily influences its successive reforms and adaptations, while in recent years there has been an evolution in the way this particular dimension of cohesion policy is perceived. Important evidence for this is the way in which the Community Strategic Guidelines on cohesion 2007–13 take account of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy. This paper discusses the territorial approach to cohesion policy in relation to both policy and practice. Specifically, it examines the territorial dimension of regional development planning in Greece as it has emerged in the relevant official documents, namely the successive three Community Support Frameworks since 1989 and the National Strategic Reference Framework for the current 2007–13 period. The territorial dimension of the organization of the planning system is also considered in an effort to understand limitations and prospects, in light of the importance of the territorial approach to cohesion policy post-2013.

Key words: Cohesion policy, Territorial cohesion, Territorial dimension, Community Strategic Guidelines, Regional development planning, Greek regional policy.

INTRODUCTION

The past decades have witnessed a growing interest in spatiality that extends from understanding development process to promoting policy options (Castree, 2002; Pike et al., 2006). This interest can be related to the formulation of the notion of spatial development in terms of both theory and policy. The very term “spatial development” has a multitude of meanings connected with several different issue areas. The multi-disciplinary character of the term causes confusion and at the same time it allows for "intellectual exercise" (Bengs, 2002). In recent years a number of diverse approaches have contributed to the discussion on spatial development, thus enriching the rationale of planning and development (Kafkalas, 2004). This is relevant to the fact that territorial units, each with their own distinctive features, have been recognized as fundamental in promoting spatial development. The enhanced role of regions is associated with the “overall emphasis on locality and diversity that accompanies the shift away from mass production, the shrinking of the welfare state, and the trends of globalization” (Kafkalas, 2004: 30). At the same time several expectations concerning the potentialities of development planning at the local level arise (Njegov, 2008: 30). These trends have led to the strengthening of the territorial approach to regional development planning.

The cohesion policy of the European Union (EU) is representative in this respect. The decision to implement an aggressive regional policy, explicit in the major reform of the Structural Funds in 1988, accentuated the territorial approach to regional development planning. Since the establishment of cohesion policy in the late 1980s, concentration on priority objectives has resulted in the identification of specific regions of intervention (NUTS II level) according to socio-economic criteria. The emphasis given to administrative territorial units, chiefly regions, is gradually being complemented by a territorial approach that accentuates geographical and functional characteristics and, more generally, the specificities of areas across the European Union. There are significant prospects not only for reducing regional disparities, but also for exploiting the territorial potential of various areas of the EU and, in general, for developing “the competitiveness of all the European regions and promote sustainable development throughout the European territory” (Hubner, 2008). Accentuation of the territorial approach should be seen in relation to the overall expectation that cohesion policy would contribute considerably to the competitiveness (Lisbon) strategy of the EU (Begg, 2010: 78). Important evidence for this is the way in which the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) on cohesion 2007–13 take account of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy and identify three particular types of territorial areas along with corresponding policy directions (Council of the EU, 2006). As Faludi (2010) notes, the adoption of the CSG had been decisive for the territorial approach even before the approval of the new EU Treaty. In this context, it is of key importance to territorial cohesion that the geographic conditions of the area of application of a programme are understood (Faludi, 2010: 11–12).

Implementation of EU cohesion policy has promoted the territorial approach to regional development planning, especially in countries with low performance in this field such as Greece (Coccossis et al., 2005; Andrikopoulou...
and Kafkalas, 2004). Now that a considerable upgrading of the territorial approach is in progress, it is interesting to examine the way this is perceived and applied. This paper seeks to examine the territorial approach to cohesion policy, focusing specifically on the case of Greece. Starting in the second section with a short overview of the way the territorial dimension is specified in the context of EU cohesion policy and the discussion on territorial cohesion, the paper goes on, in the third section, to present the territorial dimension of EU cohesion policy in Greece as it emerges from the Structural Funds planning documents, namely the Community Support Frameworks (CSFs) and the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF). In the fourth section the facts previously presented are annotated briefly and related to the organizational aspect of regional development planning in the country, especially the Europeanization process, mainly on the basis of the existing literature. Finally, some concluding remarks are made in the last section.

THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF EU COHESION POLICY

The territorial approach to cohesion policy could be considered as an aspect of the spatial approach. Actually, these two concepts “are often used interchangeably, thus flaying the conceptual difference between them” (Naylon et al., 2007: 2). A shift can be observed in the way these are used in relation to EU cohesion policy. The territorial dimension was first highlighted in the late 1980s, when socioeconomic characteristics of regions were emphasized. Recently it seems to reflect the emphasis put on territorial diversity and especially on inherent features of areas of various scales, such as geographical and functional characteristics. This is relevant to the fact that in several cases the territorial dimension has been associated with the discourse on spatial planning at an EU level (Begg, 2010; Kunzmann, 2006). Furthermore, the territorial approach to cohesion policy goes in tandem with the strategic approach to spatial planning and spatial development policies that has been emphasized since the 1990s (Albrechts, 2001; Healey, 2004; Nadin, 2007). In the context of the EU especially, the documents and processes that mainly introduced the territorial approach to cohesion policy are considered to be of particular relevance to spatial planning; the “making of the ESDP and the Territorial Agenda” is considered to be among the most important features of EU spatial planning and spatial development policies, thus influencing strategic spatial planning as applied in the member states (Vasilevska and Vasic, 2009: 22).

It was in the early 1990s that conceptualization of the territorial dimension of cohesion policy started, first and foremost through the European Commission documents “Europe 2000” and “Europe 2000+” (CEC, 1991; EC, 1994). A series of documents, both official and unofficial, outlined the evolution of the way in which the territorial approach to cohesion policy is applied. Among the documents referring to spatial development it is the ESDP (EC, 1999) that addresses not only administrative territorial units, as is the case with cohesion policy priority objectives, but also specific territorial units identified on the basis of geographical and/or functional characteristics.

The Treaty of Amsterdam was the first to include the concept of territorial cohesion in the sense of access to services of general interest considered to be one of the common values of the Union (Faludi, 2004; Andrikopoulou and Kafkalas, 2008). Territorial cohesion was then introduced in the Second Cohesion Report (EC, 2001) where “it was loosely linked to notions about a more balanced development of the European space”, as was the concept of polycentrality (Molle, 2006: 5). This report additionally related territorial cohesion to the EU enlargement to the East which was said to raise “new challenges for territorial cohesion, given the continued importance of reducing regional disparities” (EC, 2001: 29). In the Third Cohesion Report territorial cohesion is further elaborated in a way which is said to territorialize “the European model more clearly” than any of the numerous definitions of the term in various EU publications (Davoudi, 2005a: 685). According to this report “the objective is to help achieve a more balanced development by reducing existing disparities, avoiding territorial imbalances and by making both sectoral policies which have a spatial impact and regional policy more coherent. The concern is also to improve territorial integration and encourage cooperation between regions” (EC, 2004: 27). The Fourth Cohesion Report extends the scope of cohesion beyond large scale administrative territorial units to “a more local level”, that is, inside regions, in the sense that it is aimed at minimizing the disparities “between urban and rural areas or between towns and cities of different sizes” (EC, 2007: 49).

Several EU official documents also address the notion of territorial cohesion (see, for instance, Informal Ministerial Meeting, 2007; CEC, 2009; Goulet, 2008). However, there is not one universally accepted definition of the term and therefore a degree of ambiguity can be found in the way it is used (Davoudi, 2005b; Molle, 2006; Stein, 2010). In referring to the lack of an official definition of territorial cohesion, Faludi (2006: 669) noted:

“The message repeated over and over again is that it complements the economic and social cohesion goal and harmonious and balanced development of the Union as stated in the Treaty. Clearly, DG Regio wants to dispel the idea as if invoking territorial cohesion would mean a radical departure from existing policies. Rather, it is said to focus on development opportunities to encourage cooperation and networking and also to pay attention to strengths of areas and to the more effective targeting of policy instruments. This relates to the Lisbon Strategy of turning Europe into the most competitive area of sustainable growth in the world to which territorial cohesion policy should contribute.”

Obviously, besides its redistributive role, territorial cohesion is assigned other roles, in the quest to incorporate “the pursuit of competitiveness, endogenous development, sustainability and good governance” (Faludi, 2006: 671). Minwald et al. (2009: v, 15) note the confusion concerning the meaning of the term and suggest that territorial cohesion be considered in four different ways, and particularly as (a) “polycentric and endogenous development” which is based on the promotion of “several clusters of competitiveness and innovation across Europe”, (b) “a balanced development model” aimed at reducing socio-economic disparities, (c) a model in which all citizens “have equal access to facilities, services and knowledge”, and (d) a kind of networking which emphasizes “physical and interactive connections that exist between different communication centres and that also link them with their surrounding areas” (ibid.).

In the 2007–13 programming period the territorial dimension is explicitly associated with cohesion policy. This is above all expressed by the Community Strategic Guidelines (CSG) on cohesion (CEC, 2005; Council of the EU, 2006) in which the territorial dimension holds significant importance. The CSG call for particular attention to be paid by Member States and regions to the specific geographical challenges and opportunities offered by different areas. It is stated that this particular dimension of cohesion policy “extends beyond the notion of economic and social cohesion, its objective being to help achieve a more balanced development, to build sustainable communities in urban and rural areas and to seek greater consistency with other sectoral policies which have a spatial impact. This also involves improving territorial
The contribution of cities to growth and jobs: ... Programmes with a focus on urban areas can take several different forms. First, there are actions to promote cities as motors of regional development. ... Second, there are actions to promote internal cohesion inside the urban areas ... Third, there are actions to promote a more balanced, polycentric development ...

Support the economic diversification of rural areas, fisheries areas and areas with natural handicaps: ... action ... should contribute to the creation of new opportunities through the diversification of the rural economy. This includes efforts to support the provision of a minimum level of access to services of general economic interest ... The integrated approach should aim to have a positive impact on the tourism sector, the local economy, ... as well as the natural and cultural heritage.

Cooperation: Measures to promote cross-border, transnational, and interregional cooperation ... should complement the three priorities indicated ... As a consequence, closer cooperation across EU regions should help speed up economic development and the achievement of higher growth."

It is this rationale that has instigated a shift towards using functional criteria to set the priorities of cohesion policy. The territorial approach suggests new criteria for identifying the territorial units of cohesion policy intervention which are based on functional and geographical characteristics, rather than, or in addition to, those based on socio-economic characteristics of the areas concerned.

The fact that the Lisbon Treaty includes territorial cohesion alongside economic and social cohesion as one of its policy objectives, improves the prospective benefits of the territorial approach. Furthermore, in the context of the debate on future cohesion policy (Foutakis and Thoidou, 2009), the territorial approach is considered to be the main EU mechanism capable of addressing challenges and promoting competitiveness on a territorial basis, in addition to exploiting endogenous potential across Europe (Barca, 2009). At the same time the issue of the emphasis placed on the administrative units (NUTS II regions) to which cohesion policy is mainly addressed, seems to be a contentious one. In this context, the suggested transition to a differentiated way of identifying the territorial units of reference for cohesion policy post-2013 is strongly related to the territorial approach, as the discussion on place-based strategies implies.

A place-based policy approach could stress the "reference to place" (Barca, 2009: 93), restore the concept of spatial development and promote the coherence of its three dimensions (economy, society, and environment). By contrast, it is believed that the territorial aspect of the current cohesion policy is relatively weakened, for instance when it is perceived as "a tool for financial redistribution among regions" (ibid.). In this context, while NUTS II regions are considered to be suitable for managing the programmes, "almost never are the appropriate unit of intervention" (Barca, 2009: 93). Therefore, "there is a strong case for place-based development policy to be the starting point and the core of the reform" of cohesion policy post-2013 (Foutakis and Thoidou, 2009). In this respect it is interesting to examine the way territorial dimension is perceived, especially in countries such as Greece, where EU cohesion policy plays a decisive role both in financial and institutional terms.

THE CASE OF GREECE: THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION IN PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Since 1989 a considerable number of regional development programmes which focus mainly on administrative territorial units have been implemented in Greece, namely the Regional Operational Programmes (ROPs) that make up the regional section of the CSFs\(^2\) and the NSRF, as well as INTERREG, LEADER, and URBAN Community Initiatives (CIs). Within this context several territorially targeted interventions have been set up for specific types of areas (urban, rural, mountainous, border, etc.).

As is evident in the relationship between the sectoral and regional sections of the successive CSFs, the importance attributed to the territorial dimension of the programmes gradually diminished. For example, in budgetary terms the regional section accounted for 54.6% of the CSF budget for the 1989–93 period, whereas it was reduced to 28.3% and 28.7% for the 1994–99 and 2000–06 periods respectively (Thoidou, 2009).

The analysis contained in the planning documents gives a strong indication of how the territorial dimension is treated. According to the first CSF for Greece (1989–93) (CEC, 1990), four types of geographical areas were identified: (a) Attiki, which was characterized by a heavy concentration of productive activities and population, (b) urban areas with considerable tourism development, (c) lowlands which demonstrated great potential for development, and (d) remote, that is border, mountainous or island areas, as well as areas with a demographic decline. Despite the fact that the territorial dimension was quite clear in the context of the analysis, it was less evident in the objectives selected, given that they concerned only the 13 NUTS II regions of the country as addressed by ROPs. Similarly, at the intraregional level one sub-programme for endogenous local development was implemented within the framework of each ROP, albeit in a uniform way across the prefectures of each region. In this way, the territorial approach to regional development planning did not incorporate specific geographical and functional characteristics of the areas concerned.

In the second CSF for Greece (1994–99) (CEC, 1994) the analysis referred to deficiencies mainly at a regional level. Consequently, the thirteen ROPs were dedicated to reducing interregional inequalities as expressed by per capita GDP. Several inadequacies in the administrative and implementation capacity of local bodies, as well as a priority given to the upgrading of the country’s overall performance, were said to have led to the withdrawal of the emphasis previously put on local development and to a prejudice being given to centrally-organized large-scale actions in an effort to increase the programme’s efficiency and promote the country’s internal integration. Moreover, a provision was made for ROPs to comprise sub-programmes of a thematic scope (human resources, rural development, etc.) which should be the same all over the country. At an intraregional level the most important intervention in territorial terms had been the specific sub-programmes for local development (one for each of the regions’ prefectures), albeit again with a uniform character (CEC, 1994: 66).

The first decade of the 2000s witnessed a shift to a territorial approach to regional development planning since an effort had been made gling the socio-economic and territorial issues in the context of the Regional Development Plan 2000–06 for Greece. One particular chapter of the “Regional section” of the Plan was dedicated to the “Plan for the development of specific types of areas” (metropolitan centres, mountainous areas and island areas), whereas the other chapter referred to the ROPs
for the thirteen NUTS II regions of the country (Min.Nat.Ec., 1999). The territorial dimension was weakened at the stage of specification of the CSF 2000–06, as interventions in particular types of areas were incorporated in the priority axis “Regional Development” which was specified by the 13 ROPs. Nevertheless, a tendency towards a territorial approach was evident, since all ROPs included, among others, actions with quite explicit territorial dimensions that aimed at specifying the developmental role of urban centres, promoting rural development, strengthening the production base of mountainous, island and disadvantaged areas, and protecting cultural and environmental resources. In the same way, priority objectives at an intraregional level were said to include actions not only uniformly planned for all regions, but also those specified on the basis of each region’s particular characteristics (Min.Ec.Fin., 2004: 97–99).

The NSRF 2007–13 for Greece (Min.Ec.Fin., 2007) introduces the territorial approach quite clearly, mainly due to the need to comply with the Community Strategic Guidelines. In the context of strategy formulation the territorial dimension is introduced as a complement to the regional and the thematic one: “The country’s development strategy is completed by including spatial dimensions and examining specific elements that arise from the geographical/physical dimension of the territory.” Hence, the chapter on “Overall strategic approach” comprises both “thematic” and “territorial” priorities. The latter are specified in three sub-priorities in accordance with the corresponding CSG: (1) Sustainable urban development, (2) Rural development (development of mountainous areas, insular areas, as well as rural areas and areas relying on fishery), and (3) Cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation (Min.Ec.Fin., 2007: 36–37, 69–81). In an effort to define the territorial approach and particularly the strategy for urban areas, the NSRF proceeds to an elaboration of a “growth-pole” model for the whole country, the aim being “to reinforce these poles in order to improve their functionality, to deal with internal depressed areas and to plan in a right way and timely the areas ‘receiving the pressure’ of urban development.” The urban centres which are considered to be “potential development poles” have been selected “on the basis of the scaled articulation of the country’s urban system with the help of a specific set of criteria” (Min.Ec.Fin., 2007: 70–71).

Finally, when it comes to policy specification, provision is made that ROPs “will cover a common body of interventions” (Min.Ec.Fin., 2007: 104) among which policies with a territorial dimension are included, namely “policies for sustainable urban development”, and “policies towards the strengthening of mountain, disadvantaged and insular areas”. However, the territorial sensitivity of ROPs seems to be a contentious issue, as each of them, with one exception, now covers three NUTS II regions (Andreou, 2010: 17) in an effort to “contribute promptly to the enhancement of Greece’s regional competitiveness” (Min.Ec.Fin., 2007: 55). With the same logic, the official Strategic Report on the NSRF identifies the territorial dimension as a “keynote issue that aims at strengthening the competitiveness of regional economies based on the principles of sustainable development, taking also in consideration the lack of sufficient social and human capital in most of the country’s regions” (GSID, 2009: 3).

At the same time, it should not be overlooked that territorial priorities for cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation are pursued through the Territorial Cooperation Programmes 2007–13, the role of which has been considerably upgraded. Overall, the territorial dimension seems to be quite explicit in the planning documents of the current period, first and foremost at the stage of setting the programmes’ objectives, with an explicit role also at the specification stage. Of course, an overall estimation concerning the importance of the territorial dimension could be made at the end of the current programming period.

The case of Greece: territorial aspects of the planning system

As is evident from the above analysis, the implementation of cohesion policy in Greece has given rise to the territorial dimension of regional development planning. In fact, during the 1980s there was frequent rhetoric on the issue of spatial development and several local development initiatives were promoted, but it was only after the inception of EU co-financed programmes, namely the CSFs and the CIs, that the territorial dimension was pursued through the multiannual operational programmes at regional and local levels. The logic and content of the programmes as described above, to a great extent demonstrate the territorial dimension.

More particularly, in the period 1989–93 the territorial dimension was expressed mainly through the emphasis put on small-scale projects which were dispersed all over the country. This can be considered as a continuation of the rhetoric of the 1980s on endogenous local development at both country and global levels (Getimis and Kafkalas, 1992), while “the necessity of tackling the agricultural areas’ underdevelopment regarding basic infrastructure, living conditions, and support of economic activity” is also noted (Konsolas et al., 2002: 5). On the other hand, policy measures selected in the context of the CSF did not emphasise the geographical and functional characteristics of the country’s regions.

Since the mid–1990s and due to the pressure to absorb financial resources and meet the macro-economic criteria required for joining the European single currency, a shift away from local issues has been evident. The idea behind that logic was that the improvement of the country’s competitiveness through, for instance, emphasis on an outward orientation and on metropolitan centres, could positively affect the development of lagging areas (Konsolas et al., 2002: 5).

In the third programming period the discourse on spatial planning that had already started at the EU level (EC, 1997: Faludi, 2002), especially the then adopted ESDP document (EC, 1999), gave boost to the territorial dimension of regional development planning. This was mainly the case with the “Regional Development Plan 2000–06”, which the Greek government prepared and submitted to the European Commission in order that the CSF 2000–06 could be approved (Min.Nat.Ec., 1999). The territorial dimension is evident in the selection of policy measures at a regional level, chiefly those addressed to specific types of areas. However, in financial terms, the restriction of the regional section that took place in the second CSF continued in the third period.

In the current 2007–13 period the NSRF for Greece is characterized by a strong presence of the territorial dimension, at least in its rhetoric. The types of areas selected and the policy measures promoted directly correspond to the need to comply with the Community rules and the CSG in particular. Two main issues can be noted. The first is that in the document, the territorial dimension is incorporated and its proposed application described in a rather formal manner, just so as to fulfill the requirements stemming from Community regulations, concerning, for instance, the role of urban and rural areas. The second has to do with the effort to move towards a spatial planning approach evident in the document’s first chapters. In fact, it seems that the NSRF offers a forum for presentation and analysis of important spatial planning issues, first and foremost through its effort to define a “growth-
pole" model on the basis of the urban system hierarchy. While this same model has received criticism stemming from its past failures, it nevertheless remains vitally important that the previously neglected spatial planning issues in the country now come to the foreground. This has been relevant to the overall resurgence of spatial planning in Greece in the last decade (Coccossis et al., 2005).

It should be noted that the above-presented territorial dimension, as expressed in the content of the programmes, constitutes only one aspect of the territorial approach to regional development planning. Another aspect is the territorial dimension of the organization of the planning system. In this respect, crucial elements were the decentralization of the central state at a regional level along with the reconstruction of the first tier of local authorities over the 1990s (Petrakos and Psycharis, 2006: 13–14). Besides, for the first time regional development planning had a binding character instead of the indicative one which had prevailed in the previous decades. Getimis (2003: 83) refers to the “positive impact that the "Europeanization" of regional policy had on the existing institutional and administrative edifice" in the case of Greece, "starting from the programming and implementation of the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes (1987) and passing through two/three CSFs."

However, a "natural tendency towards administrative centralisation in Greece" can be argued to be the core trend (Petrakos and Psycharis, 2006: 15). Persisting inadequacies of the regional development planning system, as well as a difficulty adjusting to new challenges, most of which have a strong territorial dimension, can be observed. For instance, Getimis and Paraskevopoulos (2002: 8) note that trends concerning the third CSF "show elements of re-centralization in the decision making processes."

In the current, fourth period of cohesion policy implementation in Greece the trend towards centralization of the planning system that emerged after 2000 is further strengthened. As Androu (2010: 18–20) notes, "contrary to the government’s assertions, the changes introduced point towards more centralization ... and more complicated decision-making procedures, while there is also a greater diffusion of responsibility." This goes in tandem with the limitation of the role of local governments, which are now argued to be essentially "policy-consumers" rather than "policy-makers" (ibid.).

More generally, the forms of territorial governance which are gaining importance in the context of upgrading the territorial component of cohesion policy are in a rather weak position (Getimis and Grigoriadou, 2004: 5). For instance, despite the prominent position of urban areas in the territorial dimension of the NSRF, which calls for an enhanced role of urban governance, the ability of territorial governance at an urban level to correspond to such a role is disputable, given the persistently high degree of concentration and the rigid hierarchy of the regional development planning system. Hence, it can be argued that the country’s localities are not prepared for participation in such efforts (Chorianopoulos, 2010: 753).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has examined the territorial dimension of EU cohesion policy as implemented in Greece through regional development planning since the early 1990s. This interest is prompted by the importance attributed to the role of territory in promoting cohesion policy objectives, especially after the establishment of the territorial component of cohesion policy by the Lisbon Treaty. The territorial approach to cohesion policy can be perceived as a way of enriching the content of this policy by focusing on differing characteristics of areas of various types. In this way it fuels the debate on the criteria for identifying the territorial units of reference of cohesion policy. Of course, NUTS II regions continue to hold a central position in the allocation of funds, while, at the same time, territorial specificities play an increasingly important role in the context of cohesion policy. The content and scope of the very term and its application in EU cohesion policy indicates that, besides the multitude of meanings and tasks of territorial cohesion, the territorial dimension has been strongly related to the movement towards a spatial planning approach at an EU level over the past two decades, while also being highly connected to "place-based" policies suggested for the future.

In particular, this paper has focused on the territorial dimension emerging from the main Structural Funds planning documents in Greece, namely the three CSFs and the NSRF, while attempting to explore this dimension in the documents parts that correspond to both the analysis/preparation and specification stages. The findings indicate that the territorial dimension of regional development planning is rather weak in the context of the first and second CSFs. The analysis contained in these documents is mainly concerned with the NUTS II regions, which constitute the territorial basis of reference for regional policy in the country. This analysis also addresses local administrative areas within regions, mainly prefectures and municipalities. Areas with specific characteristics (urban, rural, mountainous, island areas, etc.) seem to gain ground at the preparation stage of the third CSF under the influence of the spatial development approach as expressed in the ESDP.

When it comes to the selection of priority objectives, the territorial approach to regional development planning becomes apparent in an indirect way, for instance in the form of local development initiatives. In this respect, the territorial areas selected are identified according to administrative criteria that do not take geographical and functional features into account. ROPs, which are the most important programmes in territorial terms, have a homogeneous content, which leads to uniform actions in all regions, thus contesting the specificities which in principal characterize programmes organized on a territorial basis. In the third CSF the emphasis put on the geographical and functional characteristics of specific types of areas at the preparation stage, is apparent in the selection of measures in the context of ROPs. Besides, integrated interventions in urban and rural areas are the most important in territorial terms and constitute a continuation and strengthening of the territorial dimension as pursued by Community Initiatives URBAN and LEADER.

In the context of the NSRF 2007–13 for Greece, there is a strong emphasis on the territorial approach at the analysis stage. This emphasis is evident in the importance attributed to urban areas, to rural areas and areas with specific characteristics as well as to the Territorial Cooperation Objective. The NSRF stresses the so-called "geographical/physical dimension of the territory" in an effort to comply with the CSG. Its analysis of the urban hierarchy and the setting of a development pole model resemble the physical planning view rather than a view which promotes spatial development patterns. The specification of the programme strictly follows the rules stemming from the CSG and the Community’s regulations.

Moreover, the territorial approach to regional development planning is related not only to the overall EU context but also to the domestic organization of the regional development planning system, which in turn has to do with the kind of territorial governance in the country.

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1 For a presentation of the regional development planning system in Greece see, e.g., Androu, 2006, and Getimis and Grigoriadou, 2004.
Territorial governance follows a course parallel to that of the planning documents, albeit with a different orientation. Evidence from literature shows that the initial expression of giving precedence to locality and bottom-up approaches in the first and second CSF was followed by an increasing re-centralization of the whole system, along with poor performance of territorial governance.

The question is whether the territorial approach to regional development planning merely seeks to comply with exogenous rules, or whether it expresses a genuine interest in territorial policies. In other words, how the overall territorial approach could be utilized not only in the context of EU co-financed programmes, but also in elaborating and promoting territorially based policies irrespective of the financial and institutional context. The fact remains that the rise of the territorial approach within cohesion policy offers an opportunity to combine developmental with social, cultural, and geographical issues, thus enriching the content and scope of regional development planning.

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