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Territorial Thinker's Briefing January 2021:08

TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030:

SEVEN ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Peter Mehlbye

Derek Martin

Peter Schön

Territorial Thinkers is an independent platform of experts, highly experienced in European, national, regional and local policy development with a territorial dimension.

Territorial Thinkers aim to support on-going policy development processes by presenting arguments, evidence, ideas, options and recommendations to policy makers.

Territorial Thinkers are convinced from experience that a clear territorial dimension in policy conception and in programme strategies and implementation releases a new innovative and cooperative dynamism which should be captured and used positively to achieve European policy objectives.

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SEVEN ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION

A WELCOME POLITICAL STEP TOWARDS TERRITORIAL COHESION

On 1 December 2020, Ministers from EU Member States and some neighbouring countries, including Norway and Switzerland, in the presence of the responsible EU Commissioner and representatives from key European Institutions approved and presented an updated Territorial Agenda 2030 for the European Union – “A future for all places” (see territorialagenda.eu).

The Agenda is the latest of a number of European territorial policy documents that have been elaborated and agreed at ministerial level with the purpose of giving guidance for the development of the EU territory. It builds on a lengthy political process that earlier led to Territorial Cohesion being added to the EU Treaty as one of the current main aims for the European Union.

The new Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA 2030) is a welcome update of earlier agendas, all of which were positive and well-intended documents aimed at developing a European territorial policy. However, hitherto – despite valuable tangible results such as the joint programmes supporting European Territorial Research (ESPON) and European Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG B) – the power of implementation and therefore effectiveness has been somewhat lacking. Despite the strong encouragement of key political actors, the implementation side is, like with its predecessors, again the main challenge for the TA 2030, even though new measures such as pilot actions and dissemination of good practice have been included.

The overall objectives of a Green and Just Europe are fully in line with current EU development policies. The TA 2030 package contains four key elements:

- 1) Strategic orientations, including six priorities for territorial development.
- 2) Six pilot actions, that shall display concrete examples.
- 3) Implementation examples, that communicate existing good practice.
- 4) An atlas presenting comparable evidence at European scale for policy.

All in all, the new TA 2030 is an impressive and comprehensive package that has the potential to strengthen the territorial dimension in policy making in the EU. The effort of the German EU Presidency, together with Member States and European Partners, to prioritise an update of the Territorial Agenda towards 2030 can only be seen as important and positive.

The high-level political agreement on the TA 2030 proves that there is a widespread acknowledgement of existing territorial diversity and current anti-cohesion dynamics, and that a territorial dimension is inherent in almost all policy decisions.

Therefore, it is a necessity for an effective and coherent implementation of a large range of policies, that policy makers express their aims for the European territory informed by evidence, including short and medium-term action needs towards 2030.

The TA 2030 clearly expresses the need to act and call on all key players for participation and support in carrying through concrete actions.

To further back a dedicated and powerful implementation, policy makers at all levels involved in shaping the future for all places in the EU should seriously debate and consider acting on the following concrete suggestions:

SEVEN SUGGESTIONS TO EMPOWER THE TA 2030

1. Support the post-corona recovery. The TA 2030 seems to address all key territorial challenges and provides for a necessary modernisation and strengthening of the TA work so far. However, the Europe-wide corona crisis implies a major challenge and set-back for national, regional, and local economies, in some places more severe than in others.

Economic recovery - the fiscal rebalancing, rescue of businesses and creation of jobs - will inevitably become a top priority in the post-corona revival of European societies. However, territorial awareness needs to be an inherent part of recovery efforts. European, national, and regional recovery plans should therefore take on board the TA 2030.

The policy process of rebuilding Europe will be huge and the spending of never-before-seen amounts of EU funding should follow the strategic orientations and principles of the TA 2030. It needs to be ensured that the recovery and economic development of places moves in a green and just direction, promoting a more climate/environment friendly and less (territorially) unequal post-corona economy. It will be important that policy makers at all levels in their planning consider and ensure action

that is territorially aware and support the diversity of specific needs in different places.

2. Make the TA 2030 priorities explicit in EU policies. The TA 2030 is largely the result of a Member State cooperative approach. However, the EC and other key European bodies have been supportive of the overall territorial approach during its adoption. In fact, the EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms made an encouraging statement on 1st December 2020, being explicitly sensitive to territory and balance and the need for applying a territorial dimension in EU policies.

What is needed now is a clarification of how Regional Development and Cohesion Policy beyond 2020 intends to support the strategic orientations of the TA 2030, where, and with what funding. Moreover, fellow Commissioners with policy responsibility relevant for territorial cohesion need to clarify what they would do in concrete terms to contribute through their policy in terms of coordination, implementation, and funding. This is currently somewhat vague, but to push the EU aim of territorial cohesion forward, it is crucial to ensure that territorial sensitivity is introduced in all relevant policies at EU level.

On this backdrop, the Commission should not only be analysing what ex-ante territorial impact their policies might have but concentrate much more on how and where relevant EU sector policies could actively support the implementation of the TA 2030.

Moreover, it would be important for the implementation of the pilot actions to have the EU level involved and contributing. It is positive that the Commission (and other key European Institutions) are considering allocating resources to take active part. Multi-level cooperation including the EU level should definitely be encouraged as a measure to increase the success of the pilot actions and stimulate a broad uptake of results.

3. Ensure an active uptake in Member States. Member States have agreed the TA 2030 and national authorities have been behind its elaboration. As at the EU level, it is important that the TA 2030 is properly implemented at national level and below. So, it is entirely logical, that the individual countries and their sub-national territories need to be actively involved in the application of the Territorial Agenda. When it comes to actual decision-making power, influence, and budgets, it is still the national level that is the strongest player in Europe.

Therefore, it is crucial that the TA 2030 strategic priorities and ambitions become imbedded in national, regional and local policies. National ministries behind the TA 2030 need to assume responsibility for its uptake among other ministries and in regional and local administrations. It will be a must to seek dialogue and coordinate efforts with other relevant ministries and sub-national levels, advocate the territorial aspects of their policy decisions and promote the application of the TA 2030 priorities at their territorial level and context.

It would be a severe risk, should the ministries lean back and say the European Commission and pilot projects are in charge now. This could damage the chance that national and regional recovery plans and strategies contribute to a territorially just and green Europe. On that backdrop, a mechanism of tracking the national uptake of the TA 2030 should be set-up. It could be part of the reporting to and discussion in the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP) and be a special issue in the dissemination of good practice.

4. Allocate committed resources for governance. The implementation via pilot actions is a positive innovation within the TA 2030. The 6 pilot actions all have strong lead partners who hopefully will provide the necessary public resources and support to make all of them a success. However, by experience, a proper implementation requires resources up front. The TA 2030 does not come with explicit funding, nor with a central node or secretariat as part of the governance set-up.

This is probably a major deficit to reconsider in support of ensuring the most effective implementation. For sure, with the reporting envisaged, the pilot actions will cement a key role for the NTCCP for many years ahead, which is good, but an even stronger governance setting should definitely be considered keeping key policy makers as active partners in the process. Should Commission policies become more territorially aware, it would be logical to strive for a governance model around the TA 2030 where Member States and the Commission join forces. This seems to be a must for boosting the TA 2030's obvious potential in support of territorial cohesion.

5. Continue and expand dissemination of good practice. The many examples on relevant, existing projects and initiatives in and between different Member States is highly informative and can provide new ideas and momentum on implementing a territorial approach, primarily at regional and local level. In general, the exchange on cooperation projects and practises is key to creating territorial awareness and should be a

continuous priority. At certain moments towards 2030, the TA process should take stock of progress made in the TA 2030 implementation and disseminate new examples of good practice.

6. Create closer links between evidence and strategic orientations.

The Atlas (made by Germany/BBSR with ESPON involved) is very convincing and should promote further awareness for the territorial dimension among policy makers. This is relevant for seeing options for additional inherent development and for exploring comparative advantages through cooperation, in particular with neighbouring territories.

However, the link between the Atlas and the strategic orientations decided for TA 2030 could and should be further cultivated and explored. One thing is to display the territorial reality on a number of individual themes/sectors of societal development. Just as important is it to look ahead and deal with scenarios/foresights taking up the complexity of territorial development and support considerations related to strategic, long-term aspirations for the entire EU territory.

7. Develop long-term aspirations for main European territorial structures.

The TA 2030 seems not very developed in terms of a European lens displaying visions for the long-term territorial structure that could serve as a reference for policy decisions. Unfortunately, it does not translate and illustrate the priorities in relation to the entire European territory, its structures and diversity.

To support the solidity of a coherent policy making and business decisions it would be extremely beneficial for public and private decision makers to have a long-term European territorial policy displaying the overall territorial policy aspirations for the entire European territory. It would improve the value of the TA 2030 to develop and include cartographic material illustrating the territorial changes the TA 2030 wants to achieve.

As said, the regionalised facts and evidence (as included in the Atlas) is not enough. More is needed to communicate EU level strategic orientations for the long-term future to become useful for regional and local decisions as well as for sector policy makers at different levels and interested citizens.

Earlier Territorial Agenda documents had the same deficit of not visualising the long-term aspirations from a European perspective. Forward-looking cartographic illustrations at the European level have, for a long time now been a challenge to develop and to get agreement on among

Member States despite that examples exist in Europe, not only at local, regional, and national level, but also for cross-border and larger trans-national cooperation areas.

Nonetheless, in the geo-political complex and increasingly interdependent world of today it would be a constructive move to debate the drawing up illustrated visions for the long-term development of the entire EU territory, and even consider this a seventh pilot project. This ambition constitutes an important challenge for EU cooperation as such, and the TA 2030 implementation in particular. One way or the other, it should definitely be pursued as part of the key policy process within the EU to deliver on the overall objectives of a Green and Just Europe.

Policy makers in Member States and countries, represented in the NTCCP, together with the European Institutions and bodies, in particular the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Investment Bank, are strongly encouraged to boost the territorial dimension in European policy making, both in structural and sectoral policies. In parallel, policy makers at all administrative levels are urged to strengthen their ambitions and commitment to an effective implementation of the TA 2030 that delivers concrete and visible results both in the shorter and longer term.

The TA 2030 would then be able to provide valuable support to the EU cooperation in taking an important and innovative step to the benefit of European societies and places in all corners of the EU territory as well as for the EU as a whole.