

# A PURPLE Lobby Group paper on EU Cohesion Policy beyond 2020

## The peri-urban and PURPLE context

As the voice of peri-urban regions across Europe, PURPLE wants to see a reformed Cohesion Policy capable of supporting the achievement of balanced sustainable growth across all types of territories across Europe with instruments and programmes open to all. The PURPLE focus is, naturally enough, on peri-urban areas within Europe and the issues, opportunities and threats of particular relevance to them.

The European Treaties serve as a sound basis for the roles and functions of Cohesion Policy and the three structural and investment funds (Cohesion Fund, ERDF and ESF) intended to help bring these about. Policies and funding instruments designed to support sustainable growth are to be welcomed but recognition and understanding of the territorial dimension is a key pre-condition of achieving such growth and that needs to be understood from the outset.

PURPLE notes that contributions to the current debate such as the Schneider COTER OPINION refer to the role that the funds can play in bringing about ".... the harmonious development of all urban and rural areas". That quite correctly brings a clear territorial dimension into play. It would be helpful to complete the typology by including peri-urban areas which contain both urban and rural characteristics. Large and growing parts of Europe are characterised by a complex web of inter-relations and interdependencies. You cannot, and must not, unhinge or over-simplistically define the urban and rural. Where urban and rural co-exist there is peri-urban, forming a distinct third type of territory which must be recognised if broad EU ambitions are to be achieved. Similarly, we often talk about urban-rural (or rural-urban) linkages but this can be misleading as the two are in many cases not so much linked as superimposed. They come together as one as we argue below.

# A territorial Cohesion Policy

PURPLE insists on there being an explicit and stronger territorial dimension to any future version of EU Cohesion Policy. Territorial concerns should sit at the very heart of Cohesion Policy and programmes. This is imperative if we are to make the desired impact and change in different places across the EU and in ways that are of mutual benefit across regions.

PURPLE wants to see the central importance of a place-based Cohesion Policy recognised from the outset of the broader process of settling the EU budget for the next accounting period. This importance should be unequivocally reflected in the proportion of the overall budget to be allocated to Cohesion Policy.

## The EU Territorial Agenda

PURPLE continues to advocate for the importance and relevance of the EU Territorial Agenda. We consider it the guarantor of the territorial dimension in all policy areas and especially Cohesion Policy. TA2020 is also important for peri-urban actors insofar as it puts such a strong emphasis on polycentric development patterns which often reflect complicated interactions and interdependencies between places of different sizes within larger functional geographies. Although, polycentric development and the peri-urban are not synonymous, the first is highly characteristic of the second. TA2020 should therefore remain a guiding tool in shaping future Cohesion Policy.

## A place-based approach

Our focus should be on developing policy and practice which facilitates solutions to real issues on a place by place (case-by-case) basis capable of achieving local impact matched to local circumstances. That in turn requires extreme vigilance about any place-based approach which typifies urban, rural or any other territorial/geographical type/feature in ways which do not

capture/reflect local reality. PURPLE therefore calls for a clear place-based approach to Cohesion Policy development and implementation – an approach which recognises differences and similarities in territorial conditions alongside other relevant factors.

Just what is understood by “place” is becoming more nuanced: it now routinely includes a consideration of “identity” and cultural history etc – that is to be applauded. We need to go beyond the solely geographic to an approach closer to “human geography” where we are in reality talking about what happens in a place as opposed to the place per se. Localities are different one from another in a myriad of ways and face different challenges requiring different solutions. The resulting challenge for policy-makers and programme implementers alike is therefore to give both shape and flexibility to enable these more place-specific measures to be effectively adopted – to enable and support testing and experimentation, to help develop models within funding programmes and in other ways that might facilitate real positive – and visible - change in local circumstances.

Hence, PURPLE rejects any approach applied in a uniform way over too broad an area. But at the same time recognises that “place” does not only mean local and there are issues and priorities that are better addressed at the regional, national and European levels. This larger-scale place dimension is valid and vital and regional, national and Brussels level approaches also need to be part of our thinking. Getting that interplay between local place and larger geographic areas right is essential, and needs to be provided for in any future policy and programme architecture. This will help ensure that for example large scale transport infrastructure provision can be supported in ways that balance the interests and needs of a huge range of local places/actors at the same time as serving broader economic, environmental and social goals.

Whether determined at the local or broader level, interventions based on local circumstances are vital. This might manifest itself for example in a scenario where there is an “envelope” of allocated money and a set of rules and processes in place, which, once established, is then given to a place (via a representative local committee) to decide where and how it is best invested. This might take the form of a mix of interventions in environmental issues, or investments in local learning, tourist infrastructure, support for local businesses, improving social services, etc etc. – all with visible impacts and results. This should be decided upon locally - in the place concerned.

**Harmonious and balanced territorial development**  
Harmonious territorial development is an explicit goal of the EU (Article 174 of the EU Treaty), this should not be forgotten and is only to be achieved through the equitable input of all relevant actors and territories. PURPLE is therefore cautious about the singling out of any particular stakeholder such as, “metropolitan regions and cities” or “smaller towns and municipalities”) to have an enhanced role until and unless it can be demonstrated on a case by case basis that such an interest is at present underrepresented and suffers as a result.

At the same time, PURPLE is also cautious about calls for some sort of realignment of roles in determining policy when that is based solely upon the type of territory which those involved profess to represent. There are multiple

balances to be struck here across various communities of interest and of place and we must ensure a proportionate role, for example, for public and private sectors, across social and economic groups, across the political spectrum and across potentially competing/conflicting thematic interests – environmental, economic and social.

As for the programme themselves, PURPLE seeks reassurance that they are designed so as to achieve some form of balanced territorial development. The meaning of the phrase itself does however need to be made clear: it is usually used to mean some sort of evenness within a programme area as opposed to between two or more different programme areas. Phrases like “hinterland” should be used with caution and any inferences as to comparative economic or social wealth or value should be challenged. For example, PURPLE will insist that the flow of goods, capital, services and labour within functional areas is multi-directional and neither defined nor wholly driven by urban cores.

In particular it must be recognised that areas outside urban centres are themselves often the drivers of local prosperity and the fulcrum of functional economic areas. They should not - and must not - be reduced to the status of secondary territories in need of support. Support is indeed required in areas outside of major urban centres, but that support will often be what is required to enable these areas to continue to drive forward local economies and communities including those within urban centres.

### Rural-Urban linkages

Rural-urban (or urban-rural) linkages/relationships should be an area of focus for any future Cohesion Policy. PURPLE notes and welcomes the increasing emphasis being placed on both TA2020 (as above) and of rural-urban partnership working. In the case of the second, it points to the very long history of successful partnership working between what we often simplistically characterise as "rural" and "urban" areas in peri-urban areas. Here, where both types of archetypal territories co-exist and combine there is a wealth of experience and expertise in ways of working best designed to meet competing needs and demands, to capture and maximise opportunity and to act as catalysts for balanced social, economic and environmental development.

PURPLE argues that ESIF programme rules need to be shaped so as to avoid unnecessary and unhelpful competition between, for example, rural and urban interests. There is much to commend explicit recognition of peri-urban territory in this regard – indeed it is often just where what we term urban and rural come together that we see the clearest manifestation of many of the economic and social phenomena with which Cohesion Policy most concerns itself. This is where therefore the need for intervention and solution is at its most acute and where valuable lessons are most readily learned by all involved in Cohesion Policy formulation and delivery in practice.

PURPLE concurs with the Committee of the Region's recent insistence on having a "holistic territorial vision of urban and rural areas as complementary functional spaces". More accurately it insists on the realisation that urban and rural are not always distinct (complementary or otherwise) entities but in many cases/places overlap and coincide in peri-urban areas.

If it is valid (and we believe it is), to take account of "urban" and "rural" interests, issues, opportunities and challenges etc, then it must be equally valid to take the same account of peri-urban territories where these interests, issues, opportunities and challenges coincide in all-the-more complex ways. In this context, themes such as quality of the environment (pollution, noise, air quality etc.), urban expansion, rural depopulation, demographic change and migration, sustainable energy transition, digitalisation, social exclusion, transport and housing should all be analysed through the same lens.

### European Territorial Co-operation

PURPLE is particularly concerned to see the continuation of European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) and emphasises its value and importance as a means for innovative transnational working. PURPLE calls for its budget and scope to be increased in the next period, and for its focus to be redirected to territorial matters. Where, as is the case with some of the current ETC programmes, reference to the aims and principles of the EU Territorial Agenda are lacking this should be addressed and TA2020 should be a strong driver across all programme strands. Regional and territorial development on a place-by-place, partnership-by-partnership, and basis should be the key focal point. Thematic objectives such as innovation through research and support to SMEs should flow from that as opposed to vice versa as is currently the case where the EU2020 strategy is used as a starting point.

The "place" dimension of ETC needs to be restored to its rightful position and much more strongly emphasised and made a key condition of funding; this approach will help achievement of Cohesion Policy goals as opposed to having the effect of pulling programme funds in other directions.

# Programme structure

## The Programme Framework

PURPLE is aware of calls for a broader Common Strategic Framework (CSF) for the next programming period which extends into all relevant EU policy and programme areas. It is however arguable whether all those funds which might be thought to be "in scope", in reality have a sufficiently strong territorial dimension for this to be appropriate – for example the successor programme to Horizon 2020. PURPLE urges caution therefore - there is a clear territorial dimension to Cohesion Policy and indeed, for PURPLE, it should be the key driving force as has been said. That primacy of territory does not need to apply to all programmes however and it would be dangerous to attempt to impose it where not appropriate.

Having all funds and initiatives shaped within the framework of EU2020 could and should have served to guarantee adequate alignment and complementarity. PURPLE is not convinced of the value of going beyond a similar - albeit more territorially focused - approach in the next period.

## Programme alignment and uniformity

Better alignment between policies and programmes is to be welcomed, for example between ESIF and rural development under CAP. Clearer interplay and cross-reference between the two would be beneficial to those delivering activity and those managing programmes. This is a particular imperative in peri-urban areas where local actors will already be tasked with balancing rural and other interests and in seeking solutions to complex issues in territories with multiple characteristics.

Clearer complementarity between the priorities, permitted activities, rules and procedures of the Rural Development Programmes and ESIF programmes should be arrived at based upon a clear understanding of the nature and needs of different territories. The same principle applies at the level of ESIF programmes themselves and PURPLE is in

favour of harmonisation of rules and processes across different programmes. This would add efficiency, transparency, ease of understanding and most importantly allow for greater practical impact of investments. At the same time PURPLE recognises that different funding tools within Cohesion Policy have different aims, priorities, and focal points and this needs to be taken into account by ensuring that there remain in place specific provisions for each fund within a broader uniform set of rules and procedures.

## The role of Smart Specialisation Strategies

PURPLE considers that any mechanism that encourages places with shared interests, challenges and strengths to cooperate is to be encouraged and should be an underpinning aim of future Cohesion Policy. This applies at local, regional, national and transnational levels. Such co-operation is proven to bring clear and material benefits to places of different types.

The use of Smart Specialisation Strategies as one relevant instrument in this context is welcomed by PURPLE with the sole condition that the local/regional level has been genuinely involved in the development of such Strategies and continues to be so in any future reshaping – especially if they are to take on an enhanced importance in the way that we and others wish to see.

PURPLE further considers that RIS3 can also be used as a tool to help form smart linkages between ESI funds during their design. Indeed this approach can be taken a step further to include cross linkages and references to non ESIF programmes with the aim of ensuring congruence and removing unhelpful duplication between project activities.

# Programme mechanics

## Territorial Impact Assessments

PURPLE advocates the use of comprehensive territorial impact assessments on future proposals for the design of Cohesion Policy. The impact assessment approach could serve as a key safeguard to help ensure that the practical implications of policy and programme proposals are fully understood before adoption. PURPLE sees particular value in using such measures in peri-urban areas where land and infrastructure is under particular pressure, where land-use is contested and potentially conflictual, and where land-use change is controversial and often problematic.

## Subsidiarity, Partnership and Flexibility

The broad involvement of all relevant parties in programme design, management and delivery is imperative - Its meaning should however be fully understood. For instance it needs to apply at all stages of the process, not only at the point of agreeing a national Partnership Agreement and with the full and ongoing involvement of both Managing Authority/ies and Intermediary Body/ies if applicable. The more complex the local circumstances the greater the need.

As PURPLE has stated elsewhere, "urban" actors and interests should have no automatic precedence over anyone else in shaping future Cohesion Policy. Such a policy, with the key goal of achieving balanced territorial development, will only achieve that if it is based on a genuine understanding of all types of territories and their interdependencies. It follows that actors from peri-urban areas surrounding major urban cores should, and must, be involved in decisions about investments in growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability and this should be done on the clear understanding that such actors have an equal value with any others and a key contribution to make. That approach has considerable implications for governance arrangements but is the only way to achieve balanced territorial development based on an accurate understanding of functioning areas.

PURPLE's call for the involvement of all relevant parties is especially pertinent in instances where a programme area is, in part, or in whole, peri-urban. In such cases it is imperative that the interests of all parties are represented evenly and fairly. This may prove easy to say and much harder to achieve, and in order to bring this about successfully, PURPLE call for the following:

- The active involvement of sub-national bodies in strategy setting and policy formulation
- The introduction of genuine partnership mechanisms to ensure regional level engagement in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ESI funds
- Greater flexibility to deliver tailor-made solutions based on specific needs in particular locations

Formal incorporation of the partnership principle between the European, national, regional and local levels is desirable for the smooth implementation of programmes, and would go further than the existing "code of conduct" approach. All obstacles to coherent programme implementation should be removed based on the principles of relevance and proportionality. Some sort of pre-assessment process with regards to administrative burden should also be considered as a means of ensuring the appropriateness of rules and regulations adopted and used at both programme and project levels.

PURPLE agrees with many others that policy implementation must be flexible, but that flexibility must never transgress key points of principle or process, or run counter to what has been democratically agreed. Local and regional authorities must be recognised and treated as key enablers of local delivery, being uniquely well-placed to bring added effectiveness, to secure proximity to local citizens and promote programme opportunities and achievements.

The underlying rationale for such a clear call for local flexibility is that places are a) different to one another and

b) best understood by those most closely involved in them. Peri-urban areas are prime examples of places the nature and complexity of which are very often misunderstood and misrepresented by those lacking detailed knowledge. This has both negative and positive dimensions, for example peri-urban areas have hugely useful lessons to share in terms of governance arrangements designed to balance competing territorial (and other) interests.

In order to achieve the correct balance between the different levels of actors as envisaged by PURPLE, we will need to ensure that:

- Decision-making is devolved, and activity with genuine local impact is driven, at the local level
- This be shaped within place-based budget allocations
- At the same time we acknowledge that some issues are better addressed and managed at a more macro level
- The financial balance between the two is right
- Any macro-level decision making is carried out transparently and fairly and takes due account of different – and sometimes conflicting – local interests.

In peri-urban areas in particular where the sheer complexity of competing interests and priorities, existing governance arrangements, and levels of interdependency and interconnectivity are often at the most pronounced levels, such an approach is increasingly becoming the only viable option.



The Peri-urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE) has campaigned since 2004 for greater recognition of the value and true nature of peri-urban areas of Europe. It has consistently fought for understanding and appreciation of the unique contribution such areas make and their potential to do more. Territorial cohesion – its policies and programmes – is a key concern for this transnational network representing the interests and ambitions of those parts of Europe where “urban” and “rural” co-exist.

It follows that PURPLE is highly motivated to be involved in the debate about Cohesion Policy and its related programming instruments post 2020. This paper sets out core elements of what PURPLE considers to be essential principles for, and features of, a revised Cohesion Policy which takes due account of peri-urban Europe today.

