

# 18 What institutional arrangements exist to ensure coherent EU Cohesion Policy planning and implementation?

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## Introduction

The persistent regional disparities in the European Union (EU) have led to a questioning of the effectiveness of the EU Cohesion Policy. Achieving Cohesion Policy goals is a challenge for each member state and its national institutional framework, considering that it is multi-dimensional in nature. The debate about the efficiency of Cohesion Policy measures was intensified by the decrease of the available financial resources due to the global financial crisis and the preparations for the 2014–20 EU funding period. Public administration reforms, as one of the responses to the changes in the financial situation, are often based on the need to improve the operational efficiency of public administration. In the context of Cohesion Policy, such reforms include improving the effectiveness of regional and local administrative structures and emphasizing the role of coordination and cooperation, as well as the development of new governance implementation tools for achieving regional development goals and growth, which are based not only on natural resources, territorial accessibility and changes in the external environment but also on knowledge and the skills to make use of them.

A number of researchers recognize that there is a correlation between the effectiveness of the institutional structure and growth. This chapter highlights the effectiveness of the institutional framework as one of the most important elements in achieving Cohesion Policy goals. The rapidly changing external environment emphasizes that the most important elements of institutional structures are those that provide the capacity to adapt to different conditions and situations.

Given the fact that the place-based approach is also described as a method for implementing public administration functions used to facilitate efficiency and results to be achieved within a given geographic area (Arefi, 2008), the authors analyse the place-based approach in the context of Cohesion Policy planning and in close conjunction with the nature of public administration.

A place-based approach is put forward as a solution to promote Cohesion Policy and is a topical EU discussion point (ESPON, 2014). The authors emphasize the need to further discuss the opportunities to apply a place-based approach in Cohesion Policy planning, since planning is the key element among functions of public administration. Planning involves the determination of goals for a given

period in the future, as well as the necessary resources and actions for achieving those goals (Fox *et al.*, 2004). Policy planning requires specific information to be collected, analysed and transformed into sufficient evidence that can be used for decision-making and for ensuring planning capacity. Planning capacity is closely linked to setting up an appropriate institutional framework and a need for cooperation between different sectors. A different set of available territorial resources and changes in the external environment mean that the same approach to Cohesion Policy cannot be applied in all EU member states.

Although one of the objectives of Latvian accession to the EU was the steady development of the country, after ten years of membership there are still significant disparities between the regions. Latvia is among those EU member states that have the largest regional disparities. Most of the socio-economic indicators of the regions in Latvia are still below the EU average, which raises the question of the efficiency of territorial governance in the country and calls for more focused action to accelerate the equalization of socio-economic indicators of the territories. In this chapter, the authors provide an insight into the institutional framework that has been implemented in Latvia and discuss the main elements of the place-based approach. On the basis of the survey carried out in Latvian municipalities, the main factors influencing Cohesion Policy planning in Latvia and what may affect the application of the place-based approach have been analysed (Baltiņa, 2014).

### **Regional disparities and the quality of government**

It has been discussed that the use of a place-based approach in regional development policy planning and implementation is in line with development trends in public administration (Baltiņa, 2014). This approach outlines policy integration and the cooperation of institutions that promote the creation of more open public administration (Sládeček, 2012), and highlights a focus on results and the need for the implementation of continuous improvements in the processes of governance (Smith, 2002). The authors remark that the place-based approach contributes to the development of results-oriented public administration and emphasizes the importance of qualitative information and knowledge about territorial resources and the development potential necessary for decision-making.

The interrelation between the role of territorial resources, the exploitation of their development potential and the institutional framework has been stressed by several authors (for example, Stimson *et al.*, 2011). Figure 18.1 shows a direct relationship between territorial resources, institutional framework and regional development as the result to be achieved (solid arrow), and it also demonstrates the indirect relationship between territorial resources and regional development (dashed arrow).

A number of scholars recognize that there is a correlation between the effectiveness of the institutional structure and growth (Chavance, 2008; Menard and Shirley, 2008). Several authors indicate the need for place-based innovation in public administration that would facilitate the development of an appropriate and

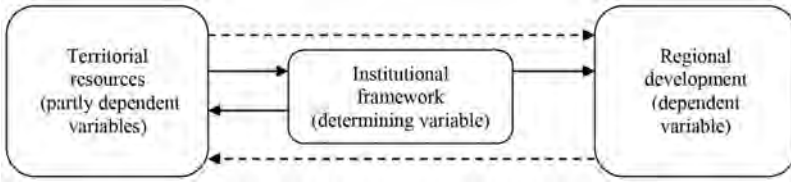


Figure 18.1 Interrelation between territorial resources, institutional framework and regional development.

flexible institutional framework (Adams *et al.*, 2010). In addition, there is also a correlation between the existing regional disparities and the effectiveness of public administration (World Bank, 2008) – the greater the regional disparities, the lower the indicator of efficiency of public administration.

To further discuss the above-mentioned statements, the authors studied various sets of indicators over the 2007–13 period and looked at the three most evident correlations: GDP per capita and quality of government, innovation and quality of government, and GDP per capita and innovation. The first two correlations imply that better institutions would promote growth and investment. Therefore, a higher quality of governance should be associated with greater GDP per capita (see Figure 18.2) with a strong correlation over the 2007–13 period. This correlation declines slightly in 2010 (below 0.85); however, this is most likely due to lagged effects from the 2008 financial crisis and austerity packages subsequently enacted, as after 2010 this correlation increases again as some parts of the EU’s economy began to recover.

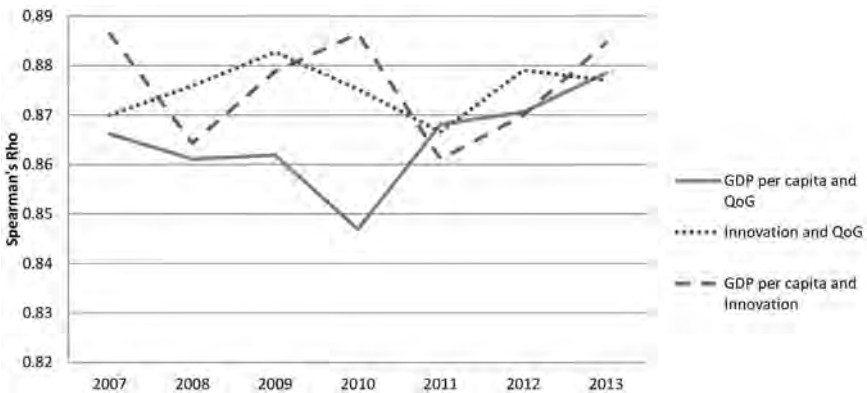


Figure 18.2 Spearman’s Rho correlations of GDP per capita, quality of government index and innovation, 2007–13.

Source: Authors’ calculations based on Eurostat data, European Quality of Government Index and Innovation Index.

Better-quality institutions should allow for a more stable and healthier business climate, thus allowing private-sector firms to make long-term investments in new and innovative technologies. The authors observe a strong correlation between innovation and the quality of government, as illustrated in Figure 18.2.

### **The role of regions and an exploration of the Latvian context**

Previous applications of the place-based approach in the EU show an increased role of the regions in achieving Cohesion Policy objectives, which gradually prompted a discussion of the role of regions in regional development planning and in the creation of a better territorial governance model, and clearly showed the need to strengthen the role of the regions. Institutional theory emphasizes that the territorial governance model should be flexible enough to be able to react to changes in the economic and social environment by implementing the appropriate actions. This also applies to the question of the regions not just as administrative units, but as active participants in regional development planning.

To illustrate the links between the efficiency of the institutional framework and regional disparities, the authors have explored the Latvian context. The analysis of the institutional framework with a specific focus on the role of the planning regions provides useful information about governance related to the process of administrative territorial reform and discussions about the role of the planning regions since the mid 2000s. The increasing regional disparities in Latvia continue to represent the main challenge for the National Development Plan. Several factors influence the achievement of Cohesion Policy objectives, but proper governance seems to be a crucial precondition for the success of Cohesion Policy at the national, regional and local levels.

One of the main implemented measures directly relating to regional development planning is the administrative territorial reform that was completed in June 2009. It resulted in a reduction in the number of local municipalities from 524 to 119. However, the authors' analysis shows that even though the administrative territorial reform led to a reduced number of municipalities, it did not bring about any other changes in the governance model or in organizational structure. Also taking into account the existing differences in the municipalities in terms of the size of the population and geographical area, the reform did not result in municipalities that were equal in terms of administrative and financial capacity (VRAA, 2012). The authors, based on their research, conclude that changes in regional development in Latvia are highly driven by changes in the external environment. This was observed in 2008–9 when the rapid economic downturn made cuts to government spending a necessity.

The analysis of the developments of the institutional framework in Latvia show that the EU policy initiatives, such as multi-level management, the implementation of the Partnership Principle and the requirements for setting the EU funds implementation system, are important factors affecting the development of public administration; for example, due to the availability of EU funds, public administration

in Latvia has expanded. However, this has not had an impact on deciding on the role of planning regions in achieving regional development goals and a common point of view has not yet been reached. There is no definition of the term “region” in the legislative documents in Latvia. Only the Law on Regional Development states that since 2006 the planning regions in Latvia are derived public entities and are under the supervision of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development.

In prior studies commissioned by the State Regional Development Agency and Central Statistical Bureau, the regions are discussed as a potential governance level that could ensure a link between the national and local levels, meaning cooperation between local governments and state institutions, but none of these research projects has viewed regions as significant bodies that could be involved in regional development planning with a clear set of objectives and responsibility within this process. According to the authors, uncertainty over or the absence of a regional level of governance identified in policy statements and regional development studies is one of the most important problems of Latvian regional development planning; this was corroborated by the results of the survey of local governments (Baltiņa, 2014).

No clear decisions have yet been made on the status of the regions and their role in achieving Cohesion Policy goals at the national and regional levels. This shows the need for appropriate changes in the institutional framework that should be closely linked to the process of Cohesion Policy planning and implementation. Therefore, the authors pay special attention to the question of the status of the planning regions and their role in regional development planning in Latvia.

Within the study, the authors conclude that the development of territorial resources is an important factor in implementing the place-based approach and requires an efficient governance model, but it does not necessarily imply a need for regional-level authorities (Blöchliger and Charbit, 2010). The authors consider that in Latvia the biggest cities can fulfill the role of the regional governance level in finding solutions to the problems that are common for several municipalities. In this case, the formation of voluntary city-regions can take place, the boundaries of which are determined by the participants, as only a common agreement on cooperation can contribute to the creation of stronger authority. Accordingly, this type of functional city-region is one of the solutions for promoting the cooperation of local authorities in developing common transport and economic infrastructure and in building another type of cooperation. According to Bite (2012), the national, regional and local development centres defined in Latvia are mainly established for the needs of EU funds distribution and are not considered as functional regions, and the cooperation between local municipalities is weak.

The establishment of functional regions must be a voluntary choice made by municipalities and it should not be decided by the government. It should be mentioned that the attempt by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development to outline the functional regions in separate planning documents is not based on existing collaborative actions among local authorities, but mainly

on unifying geographical features, such as the coastline or the border area. This can be characterized as a “top-down” approach, which does not correspond to the place-based approach. It should be noted that the establishment of functional regions is by no means a substitute for defined administrative areas, but is a parallel initiative to existing structures, as their roles and responsibilities are different. The functional regions can foster integrated planning and hence build capacity in specific areas. For example, they might contribute to the monitoring of regional development and might increase public participation in regional development. The current regional development trends show that the establishment of city-regions and cross-border regions as voluntary associations of local governments, without strictly defined borders and without an elected council, is one of the options to promote regional development in Latvia. With regard to the establishment of functional regions, it is important to develop a mechanism under which the development plan of the functional region, as well as new activities and initiatives, can obtain the approval of national and local institutions. The authors consider that such an approach would contribute to the modernization of the current governance model and would promote its flexibility as well as facilitate the use of the place-based approach in regional development in Latvia without requiring additional funding.

The benefit of using a place-based approach is that it does not require strict administrative boundaries, but rather highlights the role of the territory where the integration of different policies may be effective and allows the pursuit of small-scale initiatives in a smaller area, without the need to cover the entire region. According to Blöchliger and Charbit (2010), this approach allows action to be taken appropriate to the territory’s particular resources and development potential, ranging from strategic spatial planning to creative local cultural initiatives.

The present authors point out that the use of the place-based approach in regional development emphasizes effective utilization of existing territorial resources and that it should also emphasize the improvement of the quality of work and services of the existing institutions and the organizations. The establishment of new bodies promotes greater resource disintegration rather than improving the cooperation between existing structures.

### **Cooperation versus coordination**

Public administration reforms are often based on the need to improve operational efficiency and to create more accessible public administration. However, in the context of regional development, such reforms include changes in regional and local administrative structures and measures to be taken to improve their effectiveness. These changes emphasize the role of coordination, cooperation and development of new governance implementation tools for achieving regional development goals.

Based on the analysis of practices in EU member states, one of the most commonly identified problems concerned with public administration is an inefficient or non-existent cooperation mechanism between the national and regional or local

governments, which results in insufficient cooperation between different levels of public administration. To date, EU member states have not generally seen the need to change their institutional systems significantly in order to promote regional development (Charbit, 2011); however, their intention is to improve the coordination of sectoral policies, and this is constantly emphasized. There are several options available to achieve this improvement, according to their scope and the instruments used. Improvements in coordination can be carried out at the national, regional and local levels, for example, through cooperation agreements and agreements between institutions at regional and national levels.

The analysis shows that there are different approaches and different instruments for enhancing coordination, determined by characteristics such as the size of the country, population, government structure, cooperative practice between the national, regional and local levels, and other state-specific features. The unclear role of regions in Latvia and the inexistent mechanism for sectoral cooperation has contributed to a need for the establishment of new structures for solving existing problems (for example, the establishment of a cross-sectoral coordination centre in Latvia). However, the authors note that, in fact, coordination is often associated with additional reporting and greater bureaucratic burden. It is therefore necessary to develop a form of collaboration that includes the delegation of functions, clear principles of cooperation, the development of common goals and joint actions to achieve these objectives.

With regard to the 2014–20 planning period, in order to implement a more integrated approach, EU member states are emphasizing the need to ensure better inter-institutional coordination and to respond to territorial challenges. In response to the need to implement a more integrated approach, a variety of implementation arrangements are adopted; some EU member states move towards a more centralized implementation of EU funds (for example, one programmer per fund or a single programmer for all three funds), while some continue to implement both national and regional operational programmes.

Within the place-based approach, it is important to balance compliance with the hierarchical structure with the possibilities of implementing various cooperation initiatives at the regional and local levels. Therefore, the reform of public administration is not the determining factor if the current system is dynamic enough to take flexible decisions and ensure effective cooperation between all levels of government. Collaboration in administration of the territory can be successfully implemented both by identifying administrative boundaries and by using less formal instruments of cooperation. For example, in France there are urban communities, such as the Lille metropolitan area (the city of Lille and its surrounding municipalities), which has its own administration that includes the leaders of all of the local governments within the territory, and together they plan and implement measures related to such essential functions for territorial development as spatial planning, transport and housing. Large cities in Germany are implementing a less formal form of cooperation, whose main objective is the promotion of economic development in large cities and their nearest local governments to enhance the regions' competitiveness at the European level, by

pooling resources to ensure more integrated development and together find solutions to issues such as demographic and climate changes.

The authors agree with scholars who emphasize that the most important elements of institutional structures are those that provide the capacity to adapt to different conditions and situations (Karlsson *et al.*, 2012). Territorial resources in regional development, in turn, should be seen as the provision of an environment suitable for the transfer of knowledge and the development of new models of cooperation that facilitate the economic development of regions and innovation (Camagni, 2002). The authors see the cooperation between government institutions and organizations at the national, regional and local levels as one of the most important prerequisites of the place-based approach. Several researchers have recognized the importance of promoting the involvement of regional and local governments and the non-governmental sector in decision-making (Porter and Wallis, 2002; Panara and De Becker, 2011).

The survey of local municipalities of Latvia reveals several problems regarding inter-institutional cooperation in Latvia and helps to elaborate possible solutions (see Table 18.1).

The authors see a need for an in-depth investigation into the increasing role of intangible factors in the promotion of regional development, such as participation in cooperation networks and the development of social capital. It has been observed that regions that are actively involved in various cooperation networks are better able to see the opportunities and to mobilize their resources to promote regional development, as well as consider these networks as an essential social capital (Karlsson *et al.*, 2012). It is assumed that the institutions and organizations that are active in the creation of new knowledge engage in various cooperation networks to spread their knowledge and best practices (Capello and Dentinho, 2012). The authors observe that by combining these aspects, public administration as it develops is gradually moving away from the hierarchy and towards cooperation and networking.

In applying the place-based approach in regional development planning, one of the most important steps is the availability of functional regional development assessment tools. The regional development challenges arising from the impact of globalization and changes in the external environment facilitate the need to conduct a regular assessment of the changes in territorial resources and development potential; it is necessary to provide a regular review of territorial resources according to changes in the external environment in regional development strategies, to preserve and promote the competitiveness of the regions. Resource dynamics are important in long-term development planning, as they are associated with a region's ability to support an interaction between the available resources in a changing external environment, and covers innovation, learning, collaboration, management and forecasting ability (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Cooke *et al.*, 2012).

### **Main factors affecting the use of the place-based approach**

A survey of representatives of 119 local governments in Latvia was carried out (Baltiņa, 2014).<sup>1</sup> The survey shows that in achieving EU Cohesion Policy goals



Table 18.1 Factors affecting the use of the place-based approach in regional development planning in Latvia at national, regional and local levels (in percentages).

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Proposed solution</i>
Ineffective exchange of information between various government levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unified, location-based access to the summarization, storage and use of sectoral data</li> <li>• Website for all regional development documents and implementation procedures</li> <li>• Unified and multi-functional system for assessing changes in territories' development</li> </ul>
Inefficient administrative capacity at the local and regional levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement of strategic planning skills</li> <li>• Improvement of territorial information analysis skills</li> </ul>
Uncertainties about the competencies of sectoral ministries, lack of coordinated actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear objectives for Latvian regional development at the EU, national, regional and local levels</li> <li>• Unified methodological framework for the use of the place-based approach in the planning and implementation of sectoral policies</li> </ul>
Discrepancy between the administrative and functional territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological framework for the establishment of functional territories</li> <li>• Capacity assessment of local governments</li> <li>• Methodology for the creation of an 'effective' territorial unit</li> <li>• Cooperation of local governments in the planning of development and the implementation of joint projects</li> </ul>
Discrepancies in the established policy objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement on the main objectives and interests at the EU, national, regional and local levels</li> </ul>
Lack of compliance with the principle of transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological framework for the assessment of institutional quality at the national, regional and local levels</li> <li>• New mechanisms to improve society's engagement</li> </ul>

and positive changes in the development of the territory of the municipality, greater importance is given to the availability of EU funds than to the implemented regional development policy measures. However, more than a third of respondents believed that the implemented regional development policy measures in the 2004–11 period had no real impact on territorial development at the local level. These results show that regional development policy measures implemented thus far are not considered to have contributed significantly to real improvements at the local level.

Regarding the territorial development goals in Latvia, respondents most frequently assigned the highest priority to the need to increase the welfare of the population in Latvia, and the second most important objective was named as the need to promote the development of human resources. The answers to this question on the objectives for the next planning period indicate the need to emphasize and promote the welfare of the population.

With regard to the most important changes to be made to the current governance model, most respondents (64.3 per cent) stated that a clear division of roles and responsibilities between the national, regional and local levels should be designated. As the most significant measure to promote regional development, almost all respondents (98.5 per cent) pointed to the promotion of economic activity. Almost all respondents (92.8 per cent) also indicated the need for clear national objectives at the EU level. This shows that the majority of respondents associated the implementation of a place-based approach with the need to establish clear objectives for regional development.

The survey shows that to increase the role of local governments in regional development planning and implementation, there is a need for better coordination between local, regional and national planning authorities, as well as organizations representing various interest groups. Respondents highlighted the need to improve the understanding of regional development issues, including the EU's regional development trends and regional development instruments.

The survey highlighted the issue of improving infrastructure as the most important territorial development problem to be addressed at the national, regional and local levels. Respondents' answers to questions about the territorial development issues mark the need for the equal involvement of all levels of government in regional development planning and implementation. Respondents' answers identify the issues of regional development for which the greatest cooperation between all levels of government must be ensured: strategic planning, improvements in infrastructure, and social and educational issues (see Figure 18.3).

In the promotion of business development, the national level has the most important role (with regard to common development priorities and local authorities) due to managing territorial resources and their potential.

The results of the survey form the basis for the following conclusions and recommendations for changes in institutional arrangements in Latvia to ensure coherent EU Cohesion Policy planning and implementation.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

A well-established legal and institutional framework is the foundation for ensuring regional development, and therefore the improvement of policy documents and their mutual coherence is one of the starting points. Given that the use of the place-based approach also includes the improvement of regional development documents, there is a strong need to clarify the terms used in these documents and to agree on key regional development principles.

The study confirms that in Latvia there is no single access point to all regional development policy planning and implementation documents in an aggregated form. The aggregation of documents concerning regional development policy, planning and implementation in one site would facilitate the work of local governments, planning regions, sectoral ministries and other stakeholders, as well as promoting compliance with these documents when drafting other regional development planning and implementation documents.

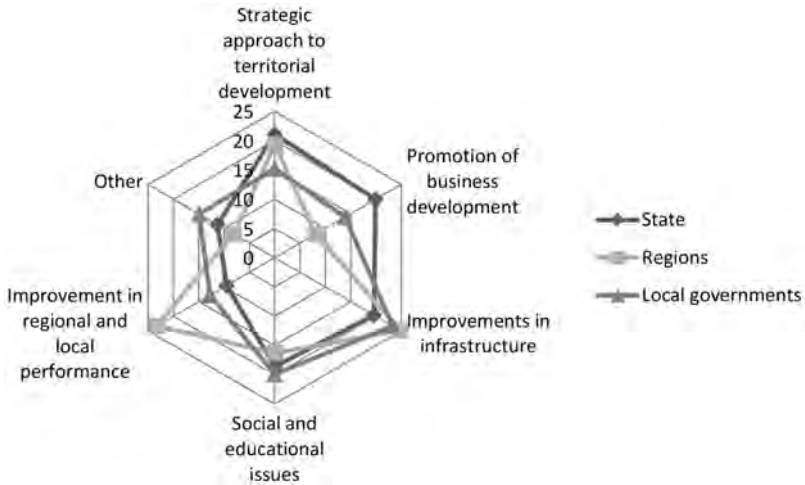


Figure 18.3 Most important regional development issues to be addressed at the national, regional and local levels in the 2014–20 planning period.

Note: Total number of respondents = 265.

The study shows that there is a strong need for high-quality and timely statistical data at the regional and county levels. Most often, the EU-level statistics and research do not represent the actual situation in Latvia at the regional level. With regard to the implementation of regional development assessments, the regional development planning and forecasting system in Latvia is still non-functional.

Institutions responsible for Cohesion Policy planning and implementation in Latvia have to be encouraged to show the link between the use of national and EU funding and achieving Cohesion Policy goals, and to find tools for collecting information and evidence so as to be able to assess the impact of policies on territorial development.

It should be noted that administrative territorial reform, in an attempt to create stronger local governments, the developed national strategy for sustainable development and the accumulated experience of the EU funds management could contribute to the application of the place-based approach in regional development in Latvia; however, the main bottlenecks are associated with the low capacity of the planning regions and the lack of a common position among sectoral policies about the use of the place-based approach in regional development planning. The study shows that administrative capacity at the national, regional and local levels is an important prerequisite for the use of the place-based approach in regional development planning, as it is linked to the ability to develop an up-to-date business environment and to provide citizens with the necessary services. The importance of the place-based approach in Cohesion Policy planning has not yet been adequately recognized in the practice of public administration in Latvia.

**Note**

1 Heads of development and planning departments, and local government specialists working in these departments, participated in the survey as respondents.

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