

The peripheral areas of Western Europe and EU regional policy : prospective scenarios

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Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to assess the impact of the new regional policy of the European Union on the peripheral areas of the fifteen countries of the EU. Is the new regional policy proposed by the third Report on Cohesion able to bring about satisfactory responses ? The recurrent concerns of these peripheral regions, and their criticisms towards the plan on regional policy are acknowledged and assessed in relation to four long term geographical scenarios in order to assess the chances of a polycentric Europe as recommended by the ESDP. Finally, a few tracks favourable to sustainable development in these peripheral regions are explored.

The aim of this article is to assess the impact of the new regional policy of the European Union on the peripheral regions of the fifteen countries of the EU – mainly the Atlantic and Mediterranean ones – taking into account the spatial dynamics of the activities and populations, liable to occur after the enlargement. After a presentation of the concerns of these regions, the community regional policy is examined from the point of view of four long term geographical scenarios (2020) updating a research achieved for DATAR by the RESO Laboratory (UMR 6590)¹ and the working group «Europe and territorial planning» in the framework of a national programme of territorial prospective applied to Europe and lead by Guy Baudelle² (Baudelle, 2001). These scenarios permit to assess the chances of Western European peripheral regions to develop by comparing the global ambitions of the regional policy with the trends of the productive system and the original characteristics of these regions. The trend scenario of *geographical concentration* permits to underline the need of a voluntarist regional policy ; the scenario of *unequal cooperations* leads to underlining the weaknesses of these peripheral regions ; the scenario of *diffused metropolization*, on the contrary, permits to reveal the assets of some of these spaces ; finally, the *polycentric* scenario tends to recall the conditions of polycentrism recommended by the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (Spatial,... 1999) and suggests a few tracks to proceed accordingly.

The recurrent fears of the peripheral Western European regions

The least developed regions of Western Europe regularly undergo increased fears. Each enlargement of the European Union generates new fears : 1986 (before the integration of the new Mediterranean countries), 1995 (shift of the centre of gravity to north-eastern Europe), 2004 (integration of ten new States) and probably 2007 with the enlargement to the Balkans.

A double threat appears to endanger the regions of the 15 countries of the EU considered peripheral so far : a new geographical marginalization, particularly for the Atlantic regions in a setting shifting to the East in a spectacular way ; a decline of the effort of the Community regional policy in their favour, all the more so as the discrepancy in development between the member-States of the Union and the new States due to join has never been as considerable as in the case of the 2004 enlargement. The enlargement results in an increase of only 5 % of the GDP and a decrease of 12,5 % of the GDP/head for a demographic increase of hardly 20 % (the enlargement from six to nine countries of the EU increased the population of the EU by about a third). When taking into account the 27 countries of the EU, the decrease in GDP/head even drops down to 18 % for a demographic increase of 28 %,

¹ Principally by Guy Baudelle and Catherine Guy, in collaboration with Rémy Allain, Emmanuèle Cunningham-Sabot, Olivier David, Jean Ollivro and Danièle Charles-Le Bihan (CEDRE).

² About the methodology, see BAUELLE G., CASTAGNEDE B. (dir.), 2002, *Le polycentrisme en Europe : une vision de l'aménagement du territoire européen*, op. cit.

compared with the 15 countries of the EU. The regional inequalities have neither been as considerable as in the enlarged Europe. Generally, it can be stated that the «stake of regional cohesion» will be twice as heavy and as large. The enlargement to 25 and then to 27 doubles the discrepancies in development, as revealed by several indicators : according to the Third Report on Cohesion, 10 % of the poorest regions of the EU 27 will have a GDP/head of 31 of the average GDP of the Community, compared with 61 in the EU 15, while the richest regions will shift from a GDP/head of 161 to 177... The number of regions with a GDP/head less than 75 % of the one of the EU shifts from 46 to 70 in the EU26 (without Malta) and to 97 compared with the average rate of the EU 15. Furthermore, while the GDP/head of the underdeveloped regions of the EU15 was 65 % of average, the GDP/head of the new regions is 37 % of average so that the ratio shifts to 46 for the EU 26. The underdeveloped regions will be twice as poor as the new Community average rate, already globally lessened. Even with growth rates «à l'irlandaise», these regions would need 20 years to achieve 90 % of the GDP of the current EU 15.

Nevertheless, the GD Regio remains optimistic in promoting the efficiency of the past Community regional policy on the four countries called «cohesion countries» (Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Greece). The Commission also considers that a region overcoming the objectives 1 and 2 is always good news as it translates its level of development. If some regions of the 15 countries overcome objective 1, it is not only due to the «statistic effect» whereby some regions exceed the 75 % of GDP/head following the decrease of the average GDP of the EU 25.

The peripheral regions of Western Europe question the efficiency of the forthcoming regional policy for several reasons. They consider that the effort is decreasing as it is reduced to 1 % of the GDP of the Union. They consequently expose the discrepancy between the ESDP recommendations in favour of a polycentric community unit and the lack of financial means available for the cohesion policy. They consider that the argument of a return on investment for the net contributing areas are of no concern due to the concentration of the industrial production system and the high-level tertiary activities of the «European Pentagon» which will mainly benefit from the orders from the new countries. Finally, they are entitled to consider that the new objective 2 focused on competitiveness and employment, but deprived of any zoning, is overlooking the structural weaknesses of the peripheral areas so far included in the zoning of objective 2 – such as their poor innovation potential or their geographical distance – which will limit their ability to take advantage of this aspect of the regional policy.

As a consequence, these peripheral regions are concerned with their potential disengagement from the core of Europe and the competition of Central and Eastern Europe which are going to be massively supported by the new objective 1 holding on its own 78 % of the structural funds.

Trend scenario : a two-tier Europe

In a worldwide context of metropolization and polarization of the development, the new regional policy does not appear to be in a position to prevent the realization of the first trend scenario of a two-tier Europe.

Illustr.1 – Concentration : core and periphery

Dynamics	Concentration : centre and periphery
Driving forces	Neoliberalism
Urban dynamics	Metropolization
Location of activities	Spatial division of labour
	Centre-periphery
Networks and flows	Two-tier Europe
Geographical regions and areas	Dual economy
Environment	Congestion, pollution, risk increase
Territorial communities	Competition
Challenges for the EU	Balancing regional inequalities

In this trend scenario, the laws of supply and demand, multinational companies and the liberal ideology prevail and maintain a two-tier Europe polarizing on the already highly developed regions. The monetary, capital, technological and spatial integration goes on increasing at the core while competition, dependency and marginalization penalize peripheries. Private investments continue the spatial division of labour and take advantage of the comparative assets of the centre and the periphery : at the centre, conception and management activities producing intensive flows of capital and information. In the near environment (a first geographical belt), an area of technological know-how is devoted to technological developments, a second belt, more distant, «peripheral», devotes to the production of secondary goods (assembly factories, standard agricultural products with a low added value). This organization maintains an unequal sharing of the tasks. In a context of severe international, interregional and interurban competition to attract and secure mobile investments, the stability of the settlements at the core is in sharp contrast with the fragile and volatile peripheral activities confronted to the competition of areas evenmore underdeveloped. The urban and cultural high-standard tourism remains the privilege of the core while the periphery remains confined to mass tourism depending from external capitals and decision poles.

The dichotomy between a rich and well-served core and peripheries in totally opposite conditions is intensifying. At the urban level, an increasing discrepancy between metropolises – notably capital-cities – and other cities is perceptible at a quantitative and mainly qualitative level. Metropolization – a differential qualitative growth – is proceeding, exclusively in favour of the two world cities – London and Paris – and the major poles of the megalopolis, expanding on the periurban environment and the neighbouring small towns. Several diagrams are possible : the Golden Triangle (London, Paris, Frankfurt), the European Pentagon (London, Paris, Milan, Munich, Hamburg) or the Euromegalopolis, a blue banana to which the Paris and Lyon agglomerations eventually unite (Kunzmann, 1998a). The southern, Atlantic and even eastern peripheries, hit by continuous or temporary unemployment while core centers undergo an enduring shortage of labour, become a source of workers. Conversely, flows of retired people settle on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. The towns most distant from the European core are declining in a way inversely proportional to their size for lack of sufficient services, employments and career opportunities, while the most underdeveloped countryside undergo an increasing depopulation and ageing, The discrepancy between them and the towns is growing.

The development of central regions is evenmore cumulative as they are better served than neglected peripheries where relative or total accessibility is deteriorating. This two-tier Europe experiences a persistent concentration of large infrastructures of transport (airline hubs, huge harbour complexes of a worldwide level, multimodal centres, highways, large size canals, data-processing networks with high flow) re-inforced by trans-European networks enhancing the value of connections between developed and populated regions offering a better return on investment. The major nodes of the central regions, deeply interconnected and neglecting marginalized spaces, act as an archipelago while, due to lack of investments, the infrastructures of the periphery become obsolete.

The clogging up of networks results in higher costs in busy urban regions undergoing a strong land pressure and higher costs in transferable securities. The social consequences (socio-spatial segregation, criminality, violence, pollution, deteriorations) are increasing in the larger megalopolitan agglomerations. The discrepancies are widening considerably : while the center undergoes agglomeration diseconomies, expenditures have to be planned for maintaining minimum infrastructures and services in the peripheral rural areas becoming increasingly deserted by their populations and economic activities.

The environment and landscapes are deteriorating both in regions of intensive agriculture and littoral pressure and in poorly populated rural areas. Industrial risks are increasing in busy regions and natural risks (floods, fires...) in deserted areas.

Several researches on the possible effects of integration and enlargement of the EU contemplate such a metropolization (Thisse, van Ypersele, 1999), accompanied with an increased regional specialization and enhanced differences of the regions within nations (cf. Krugman, 1991 ; Maurel, 1999). In this scenario, the EU is attempting to compensate these differences by redistributing the negative effects of

the spontaneous cumulative effects, but remains unsuccessful due to the increasing discrepancies resulting from the enlargement.

A priori, maintaining objective 2 and reinforcing objective 3 is good news however. The Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) approved that decision as the first objective could have been dropped. The fact that all the regions are eligible a priori can also be considered as a positive element for regions considered so far as peripheral and fearing to be deprived of further help.

The good use of these objectives nevertheless implies prerequisites: a potential of strategic anticipation, a political capacity of initiative and an administrative skill for coordination. From this point of view, the regions of the 15 countries of the EU should not be concerned due to the limited experience of the regional authorities of the new member-States in that matter. But the peripheral regions of the 15 countries of the EU are not equal either in front of this process which will depend even more on the ability of the regions to mobilize the instruments available. This leads to a second scenario called scenario of unequal regional integrations.

The scenario of unequal regional integrations (Illustr. 2)

Dynamics	Unequal regional integrations A selective organization
Driving forces	A few regions
Urban dynamics	Network of gateway-metropolises
Location of activities	Development of border regions
Networks and flows	Selection of new nodal places, gateway cities
Geographical regions and areas	Selective self-organization
Environment	Increasing and selective integration of environmental management
Territorial communities	Domination of powerful and organized regions
Challenges for the European Union	Re-inforcement of cooperation between regions

According to this scenario, the initiatives of only a limited number of regions and gateway-cities able to create transborder or transnational cooperations would re-inforce the most dynamic spaces and penalize the regions having less assets in terms of neighbourhood, urban potential and political and financial autonomy. Only the powerful regions can fully benefit from the opportunities made available by the disappearance of frontiers to develop cooperation and finance planned projects supported by the EU. Similarly, a restricted number of urban poles maintaining privileged relationships with their neighbours is emerging at bordering crossroads and international networks nodes. Some of these gateway-cities establish themselves as an interface between the Union and other geographical areas generally set to rejoin the EU : harbour or air hubs, congress cities, cultural centres or specialized agglomerations such as Berlin, Vienna, Istanbul, Helsinki, Stockholm, Marseille, Bari, Salonique or Lisbon.

The transborder flows are increasing as locations enhance the assets of external regions and offer profit opportunities due to complementarities and/or differences in development compared to neighbouring spaces. The enterprises use these differences between the Euro zone and the rest of Europe or the whole world. Interregional cooperations facilitate the treatment of transnational environmental problems : the pollution of sea and fresh waters, air pollutions, industrial risks, transborder mountaneous or marine natural parks.

This scenario appears to be selective and benefiting to regions highly integrated, wealthy and provided with an important regional power, such as the European quadrige, the Benelux and the border areas of Germany and the Scandinavian and Baltic States, the first States to benefit from the opportunities offered by this type of cooperation. Confronted to the «Blue banana», a new banana of development might even be detected in middle Europe, hence marginalizing the maritime Atlantic and Mediterranean peripheral regions unable to organize due to various reasons : national centralization, absence of regional organization, lack of human and financial resources, geographical dispersion heterogeneity, wish of better connections with continental regions preferably to cooperation between peripheral areas (Carrière, 2002), as the poor dynamism of the Atlantic Arc Commission demonstrates. The regions of Western Europe left behind would still do better than their Central Eastern-European counterparts, still handicapped with problems of borders and ethnical minorities, but would do less than regions of the Core. Finally, the transnational and transborder cooperation strategy, encouraged by the EU preparing to double the credits of objective 3 as it appears as a laboratory for European land planning and applying subsidiarity, could not succeed in reducing the discrepancy with the Central regions (Carrière, 2003). The result could even prove to be counter-intuitive or even counter-productive.

For similar reasons, the new regional policy could re-inforce the third scenario considered, the scenario of «*diffused metropolization*».

The scenario of diffused metropolization (Illustr. 3)

Dynamics	Diffused metropolization A fractal urban growth
Driving forces	Technopolitan economy
Urban dynamics	Hierarchically descending diffusion
Location of activities	Affirmation of new technopolitan areas
Networks and flows	New eurocorridors
Geographical regions and areas	The «red octopus» The Belts
Environment	Selective development of living environment
Territorial communities	Supremacy of networks (cities)
Challenges for the European Union	Encouraging new poles of innovation

The development of agglomerations of a smaller size can be imagined by the diffusion of innovations having originally contributed to the pre-eminence of the largest metropolises during the eighties (Pumain, 1997). In the course of the initial stage of the shift to post-Fordism : technological innovation, externalization of high-standard services, internationalization, urbanization economies. The smallest hesitation on the development of the economic system and the control of information also relativizes the assets of the insurance-city (Veltz, 1996), giving way a topdown hierarchical diffusion process of urban growth from the most powerful metropolises to agglomerations of smaller size (Baudet-Michel, 2001). The mainspring hence is a new cycle of growth related to the development of the post-industrial economy enhancing high qualifications in design and flexibility in production. Then a new cycle of urbanization favourable to intermediate cities is starting (Törnqvist, 1990). This process of decentralization only applies to the largest agglomeration located at the core, then the «Europe of capital-cities» including those of the peripheral countries benefiting from qualitative growth due to their size and their role of interface between the international and the other cities of their State. This phenomenon then extends to metropolises of minor rank, at the margins of

the megalopolis and world cities, and even large medium-sized cities (Illeris, 1996). This redistribution follows a fractal logic since it is permitting the interlocking of invariant forms.

This kind of secondary metropolization leans on the settlement of new technopolitan areas near the current core of Europe, in spaces offering good urban networks, residential accessibility and amenities. The lack of engineers and the search of economies of location locate the innovative milieu at the core of the production system. The technopolitan activities secure the highest rates of urban growth. These technology intensive sectors, originally located in a limited number of top cities, progressively settle in small size agglomerations benefiting from their good level of services to enterprises and their quality of life which is appealing to engineers. New innovative milieu offering a high level of services and a high proportion of professionals are appearing in the process of decentralization outside of large megalopolitan agglomerations and world-cities which, be relieved, become specialized in service in strategic, financial and cultural matters on which they have an exclusive hold. The redeployment takes place along « growth corridors » having many cities and good quality networks (Terlouw, 2001) : it is the scenario of the « red octopus » (Van der Meer, 1998). These eurocorridors benefit from trans-european networks structuring powerful and fast corridors of circulation (highways, high speed trains) extending towards the East and enhancing the enlargement of the Union (Stockholm-Copenhague-Helsinki, Ruhr-Hanover-Berlin-Poznan-Warsaw, Prague-Vienna-Budapest). Simultaneously, more importance is granted to a better quality of the living environment owing to the slightest tensions in the labour market and the demographic ageing.

The non-technopolitan regions located in the near surrounding of the megalopolis and the octopus therefore enhance their natural, landscape, cultural and heritage amenities, favouring the settlement of definite residences, double residences or temporary residences for well-off populations. This dynamic is at the origin of a total metamorphosis of some areas of the countryside in the vicinity of the main European corridors and developing metropolises, where gentryfication occurs with the settlement of wealthy retired or teleworking populations (in the field of advanced services). The expansion of these trends is originating the « golden banana » (Lever, 1999) from Barcelona to the northern Alps (Savoie, Lombardia, Vienna), this « European California » being constituted of various belts, heliotropic (Sun belt), maritime (Sea belt), mountaneous (Snow belt of the skiing mountains, a positive version of the Snow belt of north-eastern America currently undergoing a crisis), or leisurely (Fun belt).

In counterpoint, a decline of the Rust belt can be noted through residential and productive migration : the heavy industry corridor Thuringe-Saxe-Bohemia-Silesia and the old mineral austrasian basins of north-western Europe, the cradle of the ECSC.

The urban areas are expanding in an increasingly wider hinterland transforming Europe in a set of places increasingly interdependent. This trend has already started as is noticeable in the spectacular growth of metropolitan highly specialized employment in atlantic and Mediterranean areas in France in the 90s. The centre-periphery contrast is however maintained as they are the nearest areas of the faster-developing core (Beaumont et al, 2002), leaving aside many peripheral regions confined in a quantitative growth in a dependence mode : low wages, intensive technology productions, low added value (Ghio, Van Huffel, 2001), polluting activities got rid of from the Core. The Western and Southern itineraries, located outside the corridors, undergo a deterioration of their relative accessibility, particularly in poorly urbanized regions. The airline services of Mediterranean peripheries keep a seasonal character (tourism, immigration).

The new objective 2 aiming at reinforcing the competitiveness of the EU *de facto* encourages the technopolitan redeployment, preferably in these new corridors and spaces under metropolitan influence. This raises a redistribution essentially at the benefit of these spaces endowed with a larger capacity to draw profit from the effects of this objective 2. From this point of view, a large geographical distribution of development cannot be guaranteed due to its limited means, the disappearance of zoning and a priori eligibility of all the regions. It could support the improvement of European competitiveness, but at the expense of the worsening of regional discrepancies. There again, the cohesion policy would not ensure a geographically limited growth to spaces already better involved in the economy of knowledge and post-industrial society, hence increasing the regional discrepancies in the current Europe 15.

The polycentric scenario : improbable but necessary

Can it thus be stated that the ESDP project of a geographically balanced Europe is an illusion? Despite its hazardous character by 2020, this scenario nevertheless remains useful :

Illustr. 4 – Polycentrism.

Dynamics	Polycentrism. A re-balance in favour of sustainable development
Driving forces	Participants' cooperation
Urban dynamics	Polycentrism
Location of activities	Exhaustion of the centre-periphery model
Networks and flows	Voluntarist policy with multiplier effects
Geographical regions and areas	A multidistributed growth
Environment	Sustainable development
Territorial communities	Territorial governance
Challenges for the European Union	Territorial cohesion

In this scenario, the enterprises increasingly invest in peripheral agglomerations in order to maintain their profits, following their observation according to which their productivity is increasing with the better access to information available in large metropolises without undergoing agglomeration diseconomies which are deteriorating its competitiveness through three handicaps : increasing overcosts, lesser residential attractiveness and increasing shortage of labour (Catin, Ghio, 1999). In contradiction to Krugman and the « New geographical economy » (Krugman, 1991), some researches (Dluhosh, 2000) foresee that the unification of markets will rather result in reinforcing the centrifugal forces.

Therefore, the appeal of a city is no longer dependent on its size but the participants' ability to organize (Bonaverio and al., 1999). The location of activities become less hierarchical and designs a mosaic finely adapting to the local opportunities of profit-making.

The socio-economic expansion consequently potentially concerns all the levels of urban hierarchy (Dematteis, 1996). A real redistribution occurs with the emergence of new urban poles highly influential and a relative weakening of the large metropolises of the European core. The urban growth becomes even more dynamic as the cities are smaller, and the theory of the cycle of urbanization still recently considered as obsolete is regaining credibility (Geyer, 1996 ; Dematteis, 1997 ; Champion, 1998).

Economic growth benefits to the new areas of economic integration progressively developing in a cumulative manner and shifting the trend in favour of these old peripheries. The migratory flows lose their unequal character in terms of competences and age-scales. The setting centre-periphery is fading. The strengthening of new areas of international level ensures a better distributed development while preserving the future of major centres undergoing a too fast development. These centres, relieved by the interruption of metropolization and the growth of new areas, cope better with their problems and maintain their lead in a smoother manner, based on strategy, cooperation and innovation. The organization of agglomerations and the town-countryside relationships is favoured by this growth better shared and facilitates the governance of territories which is also reinforcing the economic attractiveness.

Owing to its monetary, economic, capitalistic, spatial and political integration, the EU becomes, at a functional level, a multicentered world-city exploiting the complementarities of the towns.

All the decision-making levels in Europe (EU, States, regions, infraregional levels, agglomerations, etc.) are focussing their efforts on polycentric development at various scales which contribute in return to enhancing the urban and regional power. The spontaneous movement of companies is therefore strengthened by the partners' voluntarist cooperation. The local authorities of peripheral areas implement « niches » strategies securing them extended promotion in some specialties. Policies of transport and telecommunication favour a voluntarist development of peripheral poles, stimulated by the steering effects of the first investments. The opening-up and time-space contraction favour town networks and the organization of polycentrism. This rebalanced spatial growth ensures a sustainable development, a better protection and promotion of ecological resources and landscapes. Europe is getting closer to the ideal scenario, the « bunch of grapes » (Kunzmann, 1998b, 2001) (Illustr. 4). This redistribution, which is not equal but more equitable, of the activities favours the construction of the Community : cohesion policies become finer and rely on more qualitative indicators. Europe spends better and encourages in a pro-active manner an integrated and more autonomous regional development (Kukawka, 2001). A dialectical and cumulative movement of regionalization of the policies of the EU and europeanization of the regions helps at the European construction (Oberdorff, 2003). The ensuing improvements of territorial governance themselves facilitate the construction of a polycentric Europe (Herrschel, Newman, 2002 ; Bonavero and al., 1999). The regional convergence improves economic and social cohesion and, in return, facilitates the implementation of a more ambitious and efficient policy of territorial cohesion. All this creates a system. If the regional policy currently foreseen appeared to be in the background, it would paradoxically be due to the width of the challenge to be faced in the short term.

Conclusion

We have demonstrated (Baudelle, Castagnède, 2002) that these scenarios are not excluding one another : they could, on the contrary, follow one another at various rates in the regions of the EU, depending on their own development rate (Illustr. 5). Concentration and polarization would proceed longer in peripheral areas while the central areas would reach a polycentric organization faster. Generally, the scenario of diffused metropolization could constitute a step towards polycentrism (Azevedo, Cichowlaz, 2002). The comparative advantages of Atlantic and Mediterranean peripheries are indisputable in a post-industrial economy and an ageing society granting an increasing importance to residential amenities in a space where geographical mobility is bound to develop, including at the international level. Thence the possibility of «belts» enhancing this available potential. The connexion could be established between metropolis-oriented spaces and regions with a high residential potential. The model of gentrified countrysides (in the English way, «à l'anglaise») could benefit to rural regions with well-preserved assets. This move could occur along with a qualitative move and a higher standard in the agricultural, industrial and services system of peripheral regions of Western Europe, enhancing human resources and their living environment in order to compensate the possible relocations of its most threatened production sectors in Central Europe (Fischer, Nijkamp, 1999). The polycentric scenario, despite its hazardous implementation by 2020, is useful for action and designs, with its normative characteristics, the image of a desirable future that could serve as a guideline to the planners of the European territory.

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Illustrations:

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