

RSA Research Network on Cohesion Policy (CPnet) - Final Report



RSA Research Network on EU Cohesion Policy (#CPnet)

The EU Cohesion Policy (CP) is one of the most prominent and hotly debated EU policies for decades, and a fundamental reference for urban and regional policy even beyond the EU. This policy aims to support all the European regions and cities through a unique multi-level governance system and the use of a constantly evolving set of instruments to tackle emerging regional and urban challenges, making the CP a unique test bed for new approaches and ideas.



The CP is also highly debated by both academics and policy-makers, making this a perfect topic for the Regional Studies Association. In fact, the CP has been credited for generating a 'European added value' providing concrete support all over the EU through public-private partnerships, multi-annual programming and place-based approach, as well as promoting cross-border cooperation, supporting administrative capacity, mainstreaming policy evaluation and proposing new policy practices such as the smart specialisation strategy (S3) and the 'new financial instruments'. On the other hand, intense criticism and essential reductions in the budget (about -8% from 2007-2013 to 2014-2020, and about -7% from 2014-2020 to 2021-2028) have characterised the recent debate on the CP, making observers arguing that the CP is 'just a leftover' from the past because of lacking tangible results. In this framework, briefly sketched, academics can contribute by improving knowledge about the CP, though this requires a new approach to promote a research-policy dialogue.

Source

Report by Sonia de Gregorio Hurtado (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid); Ida Musiałkowska (Poznań University of Economics and Business)

During the RSA Grant, the Regional Studies Association (RSA) Research Network on EU Cohesion Policy (CPnet) has maintained continuity with previous experience (developed in the framework of previous RSA grants). It has provided a forum for debating EU Cohesion Policy, its effectiveness, impacts, paradoxes, and future from a sound multidisciplinary perspective.

The network has been active since 2011 within the RSA, having successfully organised around 14 workshops and special sessions at all the last RSA conferences (Izmir 2014, Piacenza 2015, Graz 2016, Dublin 2017, Lugano 2018, Santiago de Compostela 2019, online 2020, Ljubljana 2023, Florence 2024, Porto 2025). Despite the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the renewed network, initially foreseen for the years 2019-2022, organised all planned activities, changing the format of some to online.

The following activities were executed:

- **Building Administrative Capacities for Cohesion Policy**, TU Delft (The Netherlands), 21-22 November 2019. Organisers: Marcin Dąbrowski (local organiser), Ekaterina Domorenok and Laura Polverari (Scientific Convenors). Co-organisers: Nicola Dotti (VUB, BE), Piotr Idczak & Ida Musiałkowska (Poznań University of Economics & Business, PL), Jiannis Kaucic (University of Vienna, AT), Oto Potluka (University of Basel, CH). Event in person
- **The social dimensions of Cohesion Policy**, 26-27 October 2020, Centro de Estudos Geográficos, Institute of Geography & Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa (Portugal), Organisers: Eduarda Marques Da Costa and Pedro Franco (University of Lisbon), as local organisers, and Laura Polverari (University of Padua), Leaza McSorley (University of Sunderland), Marcin Dabrowski (TU Delft), Nicola Francesco Dotti (VUB) and Oto Potluka (University of Basel), as academic convenors; Event online Source
- **Theoretical reflections on EU Cohesion Policy, 22 March 2021**, Poznań University of Economics and Business (Poland), Co-organisers: da Musiałkowska, Piotr Idczak and Dorota Czyżewska-Misztal (PUEB) as local organisers; Ugo Fratesi (Politecnico di Milano, IT), Sebastien Bourdin (Normandy Business School), Mara Giua (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), Serafin Pazos-Vidal (COSLA), Riccardo Crescenzi (London School of Economics), Ekaterina Domorenok (Università di Padova), Nicola Francesco Dotti (VUB), as academic convenors. Event online Source
- **The Urban Dimension of the EU Cohesion Policy**, 19 May 2021, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid (Spain). Organisers: Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) and Eduarda

Marques da Costa (Universidade De Lisboa), Marcin Dabrowski (TU Delf), Mattia Casula (Università di Venezia- CA' Foscari) and Nicola Francesco Dotti (Vrije Universiteit Brussels), as academic convenors. Event online Source

- **Territorialisation of EU Cohesion Policy**, Milano, 19-20 October 2021, GREEN Centre for Research on Geography, Resources and Environment, Energy and Networks, Università di Bocconi (Italy). Organisers: Alberto Bramanti (SPS Department, Bocconi University, Milan) and Mattia Casula (Università di Bologna) as local organisers; Leaza McSorley (Glasgow Caledonian University, UK), Ugo Fratesi (Politecnico di Milano, IT), and Nicola Francesco Dotti (VUB, BE) as academic convenors. Event online Source

What is worth noting is that both coordinators, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) and Ida Musiałkowska (Poznań University of Economics and Business), together with the network co-organisers, represent academic and non-academic institutions from all over Europe, which is a competitive advantage, strength and the unique value of #CPnet. The complete list of co-organisers is the following:

- Sebastien Bourdin, Normandy Business School
- Alberto Bramanti, Università Bocconi
- Mattia Casula, Università di Bologna
- Riccardo Crescenzi, London School of Economics
- Ekaterina Domorenok, Università di Padova
- Viktoriya Dozhdeva, Strathclyde University
- Ugo Fratesi, Politecnico di Milano
- Carola Fricke, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg
- Mara Giua, Università degli Studi Roma Tre
- Piotr Idczak, Poznan University of Economics and Business
- Jiannis Kaucic, Universität Wien
- Eduarda Marques da Costa, Universidade de Lisboa
- Leaza McSorley, The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), UK
- Serafin Pazos-Vidal, European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)
- Laura Polverari, Università di Padova

- Oto Potluka, Universiteit Basel
- Paula Tulppo, University of Lapland

The shift to online mode resulted in cost savings compared to the planned budget; thus, the RSA proposed extending the network's timespan. In the meantime, a change in the network coordinators took place (from Nicola F. Dotti (formerly VUB, BE) to Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado and Ida Musiałkowska, who were actively involved in the activities mentioned). The two new co-coordinators presented an action plan for the extended network, #CPnet, covering 2023 and 2024.

Following four workshops and events took place during the extended timespan of the RSA Grant on which we are reporting:

- **Digitalising Regions and Cities as a Driver for Postindustrial Transition.** 21 November 2023. Event online. Organisers: Sebastien Bourdin, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado, and Ida Musiałkowska.

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- **The EU Cohesion Policy. Today and Tomorrow.** - Launch of the book "EU Cohesion Policy. A Multidisciplinary Approach", Poznań University of Economics and Business, Wielkopolska Region Office, Brussels, 22 February 2024. In-person event. Source Organisers: Ida Musiałkowska, Joanna Kubiak (Wielkopolska Office Region), Nicola F. Dotti

- **Past & futures of Sustainable Development, Environment and Green economy in EU Cohesion policies,** 6 September 2024. Event online. Organisers: Silvia Grandi (Università di Bologna), Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado and Ida Musiałkowska. Event online Source

- **Sustainable Transitions. Balance and future challenges in the EU Cohesion Policy Context.** Online. 9 December 2024. Organisers: Eduarda da Costa and Pedro Franco (Universidade de Lisboa) as local organisers, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado and Ida Musiałkowska as academic convenors. Event online.

- **How to reconcile Growth and Convergence. Exploring the neglected dilemma of Cohesion Policy?** European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels, 9 October 2024, together with other partners: JRC - European Commission

(Anabela Santos, Francesco Molica), AEIDL (Serafin Pazos-Vidal), Poznań University of Economics and Business (Ida Musiałkowska), Politecnico di Milano (Ugo Fratesi), RSA, CPnet (Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado). Event in person Source

The CPnet publications include the following:

- Monograph **“Successes & Failures in EU Cohesion Policy: An Introduction to EU Cohesion Policy in Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe”**, Warsaw, Poland: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2020. Source Editors: Ida Musiałkowska, Piotr Idczak, Oto Potluka
- Special issue of Regional Studies entitled **“Administrative capacity and Cohesion Policy”**, Regional Studies, vol. 58, issue 4, 2024: Source editors: John Bachtler, Laura Polverari, Ekaterina Domorenok & Paolo Graziano
- Monograph **“EU Cohesion Policy. A Multidisciplinary Approach”**, Edward Elgar Publishing- editors: Nicola F. Dotti, Ida Musiałkowska, Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado, Julia Walczyk. Source

It is worth mentioning that the monograph was the subject of a special event—the book launch— with the participation of both academics (editors) and practitioners who discussed the past and future of Cohesion Policy in Brussels. Besides, it was presented in the broader discussion - a round table - at the RSA Annual Conference in Florence in 2024, and Ida Musiałkowska gave a keynote speech at the Plenary Session of the Dubrovnik CEE Conference the same year.

The CPnet has succeeded in animating the policy debate with one policy-oriented workshops in Brussels discussing the book published as a result of the work of the network “Cohesion Policy. A Multidimensional Approach” (Edgar Elgar, 2024) edited by Nicola Francesco Dotti (former chair of CPnet), Ida Musiałkowska and Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado (current CPnet co-chairs) with high level EU policy-makers (MEPs, Commissioner’s cabinet, EU Commission staff, the Committee of the Regions and other high-level EU policymakers) as well as contributing to the academic debate being present in social networks and RSA events.

It is also remarkable to say that the CPnet has organised sessions for the European Week of Cities and Regions several times over the last years on different topics (the gender perspective in the urban policy of the EU; European cities as green dealers; growth and convergence or dilemma of equity and

efficiency aspects under the cohesion policy). The two coordinators played a leading role in proposing and organising these sessions.

Regarding the network's results, it is worth noting that it has been strengthened by integrating new members with diverse backgrounds and ages. In recent years, the coordinators have made a significant effort to attract younger scholars to CPnet's activities.

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Besides, through the collaboration, the CPnet members submitted many applications for funding from different calls for proposals.

The network activity has led to the emergence of new research on Cohesion Policy, in terms of ideas, approaches and methods that can contribute to renovating the scientific debate on CP, which is crucial for the forthcoming multiannual financial framework 2028-2034, where a significant shift in EU policy-making is envisaged. Thus, the policy responsible for 1/3 of the EU budget can't be left without further reflection and research.

Furthermore, the activity developed by CPnet has increased the RSA's visibility among academics, policy-makers, practitioners, and other actors working on CP or researching it.

Thus, the activity mentioned above has paved the way for the further

development of the Research Network on Cohesion Policy, hopefully under the umbrella of the RSA.

The next CPnet activity is planned for 12th November. It will be an online open seminar organised jointly with the Jean Monnet Chair RegenEU (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) entitled: “The post-2027 urban policy of the European Union. What regenerative action to achieve the EGD objectives?” Source

Organisers

- Sonia de Gregorio Hurtado, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
- Ida Musialkowska, Poznan University of Economics and Business, Poland

Co-organisers

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- Alberto Bramanti, Università Bocconi
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- Riccardo Crescenzi, London School of Economics
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