

ESPON Workshop “Cohesion Policies, backbone of Europe? The role of metropolitan areas”

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Trust-oriented versus market-oriented EU policies

In the last 30 years Europe has mostly developed competition and market policies, the European version of neoliberal or ordoliberal policies, a more subtle kind of neoliberalism based on State intervention to favour market. Europe had chosen to increase ‘negative’ liberty: not to protect local and national labour markets, not to reduce the freedom of capital to circulate, and so on. It was a season of low trust, or no trust policies that Europe implemented. Economic agents acted by themselves in isolation and open competition, without cohesion and without being able to rely on each other. The result has been a widening of social and territorial injustice: many territories have been left behind, and social inequality has increased (in Eastern Europe income is 35% below the European average, in Southern Europe it is 10% below).

However like Penelope, Europe continued to recreate the textures destroyed by liberalization and deregulation, the textures of another social and territorial continent based on cohesion policies.

These are high trust policies based on integration of economic and social actors in glocal societies, institutions and value chains. Glocal means neither local nor global but a new space of interaction where each local has a say in global matters like the environment, social justice and democracy. Its normative basis is article 3 of EU Treaty on economic, social and territorial cohesion.

So there have been two Europes: a market-led confederation of States, a trust-oriented federation of territories.

Trust is a reduction of social complexity and risk, and also refers to power as a communicative medium: trust is a response to the lack of communication or manipulation of communication by political and technical powers. Social trust-the fact that I can trust my neighbour citizens- is a coping mechanism when general uncertainty increases (like today), and has a positive impact on local development and societal goals, even on fertility rates of population as demography studies have shown. Cohousing and coworking spaces are created in our cities, new intelligent communities of physical and intellectual proximity arise even beyond metropolitan areas, in small cities and the countryside along corridors. Suppliers, workers, the creative class and local institutions create networks to cooperate.

Cohesion policies favour all those kinds of trust. They account for one third of the European budget but their role is much bigger, is paramount. In 2050 the world will be made of continental States, Europe among them based on social cohesion.

In fact Europe is based on cities, metropolitan regions and territorial networks. European city in its history has been the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. *All* these institutions: cultural and moral, economic, juridical and educational are needed to create an integrated society.

Markets and companies must comply to social and moral objectives. The European Parliament resolution of March 10, 2021 has asked for corporate due diligence and accountability in term of human rights, social and environmental justice in Europe and in developing countries where European companies operate. If implemented, it can be a game change, a map for our future navigation. The European Parliament criticizes globalization because globalization gains have been not equally distributed, and gives us a new approach.

Glocal and metropolitan policies must take the lead to create a high trust, glocal intelligent society able to compete with America and China, both low trust societies oriented to and dominated by platform monopoly capitalism.

Europe-it’s true-has no startups to rival Amazon or Google, so let’s create such a seedbed for a new generation of digital companies based on trust, giving to the European creative class the role of co-owners of the platforms and to the European citizens the forms of control over the platforms. Europe can be the future of a better world based on social cohesion values and the protection of the living environment, today challenged by climate change and wrong human behaviours particularly in China and in America.

So let’s go on with place-based, glocal and green cohesion policies in Europe!



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