

Article

# Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion and Sustainability in Europe: An Overview

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**Abstract:** This paper provides an analysis of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe, using a conceptual framework that takes into account theoretical approaches and empirical studies. Three case studies were examined, including the Tâmega e Sousa region in Portugal, the Jaén region in Spain, and the Province of Avellino in Italy. The analysis revealed similarities and differences between these territories in terms of the effectiveness of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability. Positive points included the creation of networks and partnerships, the use of smart specialization strategies, and the promotion of sustainable tourism. Negative points included a lack of coordination between different levels of government, insufficient investment in infrastructure, and a lack of awareness of the potential benefits of sustainability. Based on these findings, the paper suggests several recommendations for public policies and research on territorial cohesion and sustainability. These include the need for greater collaboration between different levels of government and stakeholders, increased investment in infrastructure and innovation, and the development of more sustainable tourism strategies. Overall, this paper highlights the importance of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in promoting economic development, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability in Europe.

**Keywords:** public policies; European Union; territorial cohesion; sustainability; regional development



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## 1. Introduction

Territorial cohesion and sustainability are critical issues for the European Union (EU) as it seeks to promote economic, social, and environmental well-being across its diverse regions. Public policies play a crucial role in achieving these goals, by fostering spatial development that supports territorial cohesion and sustainability.

Territorial cohesion refers to a process of designing a more integrated and cooperative and balanced territory, seeking to overcome the deficits of strategic articulation, administrative constraints, and existing development asymmetries. It is oriented towards the promotion of sustainable development and a more balanced, integrated, and well-governed territorial organization. It values diversity, complementarity, and territorial articulation, as well as social and spatial justice as structuring elements of decision-making. It assumes that territorial specificities (natural and economic diversity) should be valued, enabling citizens to make the most of inherent features of these territories [1]. This concept is crucial for ensuring that no region is left behind, and that the benefits of economic growth are shared across the EU. Sustainability, on the other hand, refers to the idea of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This requires a balance between economic, social, and environmental considerations, and is essential for ensuring the long-term prosperity and well-being of European citizens. The latest cohesion report, published by the European Commission in 2022 [2], formally recognizes some of the long-term identified problems in countries like Portugal, Spain, or Italy. It points out, objectively, that cohesion between the Member States has been increasing, but that regional asymmetries in each country have been strengthening.

Public policies can help to promote both territorial cohesion and sustainability by providing a framework for guiding spatial planning and development across Europe. For example, policies can promote the use of renewable energy sources, encourage sustainable transport systems, and support the preservation of cultural heritage. These policies can also help to reduce regional disparities in economic development by investing in infrastructure and innovation in less developed regions.

Previous studies [3–10] provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of EU public policies to promote territorial cohesion, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with these policies. They cover a range of topics, including EU cohesion policy, smart specialization, spatial planning, Regional Operational Programs and territorial governance, and the links between economic development and spatial inequalities. Overall, we can conclude that while there have been positive points in the effectiveness of EU public policies to promote territorial cohesion, there are also negative points and challenges that need to be addressed to ensure more effective policy design, implementation, and monitoring [1,11,12]. The positive points are mainly associated to funding, policy coordination, smart specialization, and networking and learning. On the other hand, the negative points are related to several implementation challenges (including administrative burdens, lack of capacity, and weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms), the unequal distribution of funds, a limited focus on social cohesion, and complex governance challenges.

The EU has also developed a range of policy instruments to promote sustainability [13–18], including the Europe 2020 strategy (approved by the European Council on 17 June 2010), the Sustainable Development Goals (approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 25 September 2015), the Circular Economy Action Plan (approved by the European Commission on 10 March 2020), the EU Emissions Trading System (approved by the European Parliament and the Council on 25 October 2003) and the Renewable Energy Directive (first adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 17 December 2008, and revised on 14 June 2018). The establishment of a framework for promoting sustainable consumption and production was also important, through initiatives such as the EU Eco-label and the Sustainable Consumption and Production Action Plan. However, some EU policies may have unintended negative consequences, such as the promotion of biofuels leading to deforestation and increased food prices [1,11]. The implementation of EU policies may also face resistance from member states, who may have different priorities and interests.

Given the importance of territorial cohesion and sustainability for the EU, it is critical to understand the effectiveness of public policies in promoting them. This paper aims to contribute to this understanding by discussing scientific studies and operational projects and regulations for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe, analyzing regional specificities and projects, and presenting the results of an empirical study on their effectiveness. Based on three case studies, this paper aims at contributing to the discussion the importance of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in promoting economic development, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability, considering the experiences and learnings from three Southern Europe regions.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The methods used consist of a literature review, policy documents analysis, and fieldwork, with project analysis and two exploratory interviews in each region (namely with the public entity representative and the project manager). The interviews were conducted using the conceptual framework presented below, oriented to understand recent dynamics, projects, and effects on territorial cohesion and sustainability. The open interviews were analyzed in terms of content using the Vivo software. They were not analyzed statistically. Three convergence regions were chosen: Tâmega e Sousa (Portugal), Jaén (Spain), and the Province of Avellino (Italy). The analysis was conducted in the second semester of 2022.

The regions were selected considering the existence of similar context characteristics, reinforcing the ability to compare results and the effectiveness of public policies. Tâmega e

Sousa in Portugal, Jaén in Spain, and the Province of Avellino in Italy share several social, economic, and demographic similarities. Firstly, these regions are all located in southern Europe, which is characterized by a Mediterranean climate and similar cultural traditions. Secondly, they are all classified as convergence regions by the European Union Cohesion Policy due to their lower economic development relative to the EU average.

In terms of economic similarities, all three regions are characterized by a high degree of dependence on traditional sectors such as agriculture and industry, as well as a lack of diversification in their economies. Additionally, they face challenges such as high unemployment rates, low GDP per capita, and limited access to funding and investment. Socially, all three regions have experienced significant emigration in recent years, particularly among young people, resulting in an aging population and a decline in the number of inhabitants. This demographic trend has also led to a decrease in the labor force and a shortage of skilled workers. Despite these challenges, these regions also share some positive characteristics. They have rich cultural heritage and natural resources, which can be leveraged for sustainable tourism and other economic activities. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly through the development of digital technologies and the green economy.

A conceptual framework for analyzing public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe is proposed, which provides a structured approach for evaluating their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement. This conceptual framework consists of:

- **Recent trends, goals, and objectives:** The first element of the framework is to identify the goals and objectives of the policies being analyzed. This may include economic development, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, governance, and territorial cohesion. It is important to consider how these goals are defined and prioritized in policy documents and to what extent they are aligned with the broader policy goals of the EU and other international organizations.
- **Policy instruments and projects:** The second element of the framework is to analyze the policy instruments that are used to achieve the goals and objectives of the policies. This may include financial instruments, regulatory measures, knowledge transfer, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement. It is important to consider how these instruments are designed and implemented and to what extent they are effective in achieving the desired outcomes.
- **Results:** The third and final element of the framework is to analyze the results and effects of the policies. This may include economic, social, and environmental indicators, as well as the extent to which the policies contribute to territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe. It is important to consider how the policies contribute to positive outcomes and impact, as well as any unintended consequences or negative externalities that may arise.

### 3. Literature Review

Over the past decades, several public policies and programs for territorial cohesion and sustainability have been developed in Europe. Overall, these policies and programs aimed to promote territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe through a range of measures, including investment in infrastructure and research, promotion of sustainable practices, and the development of partnerships between different stakeholders. The results of these initiatives have included improvements in territorial development, social cohesion, energy efficiency, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and increased investment in sustainable technologies and practices [19–26].

The most relevant programs, policies, and initiatives are:

1. **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF):** Funds designed to promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion across the EU. The ESIF supports a wide range of activities, including innovation, environmental protection, and regional development. The funds have supported numerous projects, including infrastructure

- improvements, renewable energy development, and initiatives to support small and medium-sized enterprises.
2. Europe 2020: The EU's ten-year growth strategy, which aims to create a smart, sustainable, and inclusive economy. The strategy focuses on five main areas: employment, innovation, education, social inclusion, and climate and energy. The goal is to achieve these objectives through a range of policy measures, including investment in research and innovation, promotion of renewable energy, and the development of sustainable transport systems.
  3. European Green Deal: A comprehensive plan to make the EU's economy sustainable and carbon-neutral by 2050. The Green Deal includes a range of initiatives, such as increasing the use of renewable energy sources, promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry, and developing a circular economy. The goal is to transform the EU's economy and society to meet the challenges of climate change and resource depletion.
  4. Horizon 2020: The EU's research and innovation program, which supports a wide range of projects aimed at addressing societal challenges. Horizon 2020 includes a number of themes related to sustainability, such as climate action, clean energy, and sustainable transport. The program has supported numerous research projects, including the development of new technologies for renewable energy, sustainable food production, and eco-innovation.
  5. LIFE Programme: The EU's funding program for the environment and climate action. The program supports projects that aim to protect the environment, mitigate climate change, and promote resource efficiency. The LIFE program has supported a wide range of projects, including initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve waste management, and protect biodiversity.
  6. Urban Agenda for the EU: a partnership between the EU, member states, and cities aimed at addressing urban challenges and promoting sustainable urban development. The Urban Agenda focuses on a range of issues, including air quality, sustainable transport, and social inclusion. The program has supported a number of initiatives, such as the development of sustainable urban mobility plans and the promotion of green infrastructure.

The literature on public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe has grown significantly over the past two decades. In previous works [1,12], we have discussed conceptually territorial governance and its winding road within the European Union. The main ideas addressed in those papers, related studies [26–39], and policy documents (Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, Cohesion Reports, Lisbon Treaty, Strategy 2020 documents) point out that the European Union's (EU) cohesion policy plays an essential role in promoting a balanced territorial development and strengthening a culture of spatial planning among member states. The policy aims to reduce economic, social, and territorial disparities through financial support mechanisms for underdeveloped regions. Territorial asymmetries are caused by differences in population distribution, income levels, gross domestic product growth rates, and more, leading to various challenges for economy, justice, environmental and social responses, and territorial governance models. The evolution of the cohesion policy towards including the territorial dimension can be associated with five central issues, including the fact that adopting market-friendly policies does not promote balanced development, impact assessments showing limited impact on reducing territorial asymmetries, consolidation of new dynamics and forms in which territorial disparities express themselves, the considerable investment not having expected effects, and the EU's model of balanced territorial occupation being disconnected from reality in some countries and regions.

The EU's journey towards territorial cohesion has been a winding road marked by theoretical uncertainty and difficulty in practical application. Despite being present in European policy agendas since the publication of the European Spatial Development Perspective in 1999, the conceptual construction of territorial cohesion was neglected for many years. However, in the first decade of the 21st century, the concept gained momentum,

and the EU started promoting it in different scales with distinct goals and meanings. Although there is no exact, precise, and universal definition of territorial cohesion, the EU has made several references to the territorial dimension in different documents.

In short, territorial cohesion is an important element of the EU's cohesion policy, aiming to reduce economic, social, environmental, and territorial disparities by promoting balanced territorial development. The EU's model of balanced territorial occupation, however, is disconnected from reality in some countries and regions, leading to significant challenges. The journey towards territorial cohesion has been marked by theoretical uncertainty and difficulty in practical application, but the EU has made progress by operationalizing and promoting it in different scales with distinct goals and meanings. Although there is no precise and universal definition of territorial cohesion, the EU has made several references to the territorial dimension in different documents, and it remains a critical element in promoting a more balanced territorial development among member states.

Several theoretical approaches [40–42] have also been developed to understand the complex relationships between spatial development, territorial cohesion, and sustainability.

One of the most influential theoretical frameworks is the territorial approach to regional development (TARD) [43–45], which emphasizes the importance of place-based policies for achieving territorial cohesion and sustainability. TARD argues that policies should be designed to take into account the specific context of each region, including its economic, social, and environmental characteristics. This approach has been influential in shaping EU policies, such as the European Territorial Agenda and the Cohesion Policy.

Another theoretical approach that has gained prominence is the concept of smart specialization [46–48], which emphasizes the importance of regional innovation and knowledge-based development for promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability. This approach is based on the idea that each region has specific strengths and assets, which can be leveraged to promote economic growth and social development.

Based on this analysis, we can argue that, over the past decades, there have been significant advances in terms of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe, but there are also obstacles and problems that persist. The major gains and obstacles are listed in Table 1.

Overall, while there have been significant advances and improvements in the design public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that these policies are effective in promoting sustainable and inclusive territorial development. The existing literature [1,49–53] highlights the importance of public policies for promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe, and provides valuable insights into the theoretical approaches and empirical evidence on this topic.



**Table 1.** Major improvements and problems in terms of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability over the past decades in Europe.

Major Advances and Improvements	Obstacles or Problems
<p>EU Cohesion Policy: The EU Cohesion Policy has played a key role in promoting territorial cohesion and reducing regional disparities in economic development across Europe. The 8th Report on Territorial Cohesion is clear about this, at the European scale. The policy has provided significant funding for infrastructure development, research and innovation, and social inclusion initiatives in less developed regions, contributing to economic growth and social development.</p> <p>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The adoption of the SDGs by the United Nations in 2015 has also had a significant impact on public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe. The SDGs provide a global framework for promoting sustainable development, and many EU policies, such as the European Green Deal, are aligned with the SDGs. In the context of territorial cohesion and sustainability, the SDGs have helped to mainstream these concepts into public policies at all levels, from local to regional, national, and European. The SDGs provide a set of indicators and targets that can be used to monitor progress and evaluate the impact of policies and programs. Furthermore, the SDGs promote a holistic and integrated approach to territorial development, which recognizes the interdependence of social, economic, and environmental factors. Thus, the adoption of the SDGs has contributed to a greater focus on territorial cohesion and sustainability in public policies in Europe, and has helped to align these policies with global objectives and best practices.</p> <p>Smart Specialization: The concept of smart specialization has gained prominence in recent years, emphasizing the importance of regional innovation and knowledge-based development for promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability. This approach has led to the development of regional innovation strategies and funding programs that support research, innovation, and entrepreneurship in specific regions. The idea behind smart specialization is that it can help regions to overcome the challenges of globalization, by enabling them to develop high-value-added products and services that are unique and difficult to replicate. This approach has been shown to be effective in promoting economic growth, creating jobs, and increasing productivity. By focusing on innovation and knowledge-based development, smart specialization can help to build more resilient and sustainable regional economies, while also reducing disparities between regions.</p>	<p>Unequal territorial development: Despite the progress made in reducing regional disparities in economic development, there are still significant differences in territorial development across Europe. Some regions continue to face challenges in attracting investment and developing their economies, leading to persistent disparities in income, employment, and social inclusion. To address these disparities, policymakers have implemented various initiatives, including territorial development strategies, regional development programs, and policies that promote innovation and entrepreneurship. However, more needs to be done to ensure that all regions can benefit from economic growth and development. The persistence of territorial inequalities highlights the need for a more comprehensive approach to territorial development that takes into account the specific challenges faced by different regions and promotes inclusive and sustainable development for all.</p> <p>Environmental challenges: Environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution continue to pose significant threats to territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe. These challenges can cause significant damage to natural resources and ecosystems, leading to a decline in the quality of life for individuals living in these territories. Addressing these environmental challenges requires the implementation of policies that promote sustainable development practices, such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, and protecting biodiversity. The argument further emphasizes that while policies have been developed to address environmental challenges, the actual implementation has been slow, leading to a gap between policy goals and actual outcomes.</p> <p>Governance challenges: Governance challenges such as administrative fragmentation, policy coordination, and stakeholder participation can also hinder the effectiveness of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability in Europe. Evidence shows that several problems persist in managing and coordinating policies and stakeholders across different levels of governance. Effective governance structures and processes are essential for ensuring that policies are designed and implemented in a coordinated and participatory manner, taking into account the specific needs and characteristics of each region.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, based on the scientific literature and practical studies [1,13,46–53].

## 4. Results

The results are presented individually for each of the case studies.

### 4.1. Tâmega e Sousa, Portugal

The Tâmega e Sousa region is located in the North of Portugal and is composed of 11 municipalities. In recent years, the region has undergone significant changes, particularly in terms of economic development and territorial cohesion. The population of the region has been stable, with a slight increase from 429,273 inhabitants in 2011 to 431,396 in 2021. However, the region's GDP has been growing steadily, reaching EUR 5.3 billion in 2019, an increase of 19% compared to 2015.

In recent years, the Tâmega e Sousa region has been the subject of various projects aimed at promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability [54–57]. One of the most significant projects is the Territorial Pact, a strategic planning document that aims to coordinate public policies and investments in the region. The Territorial Pact is based on the principles of smart specialization and aims to promote innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability in the region (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Territorial cohesion and sustainability in Tâmega e Sousa: main ideas.

Recent Trends	Positive Points
<p>Integrated approach: The Tâmega e Sousa region has adopted an integrated approach to regional development, which involves a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors, including public authorities, private companies, civil society organizations, and academia.</p> <p>Smart specialization: The region has developed a smart specialization strategy based on its existing strengths and potential, with a focus on innovation and competitiveness in specific sectors such as tourism, agribusiness, and renewable energy.</p> <p>Sustainable mobility: The region has implemented several initiatives to promote sustainable mobility, including the development of bike lanes, pedestrian paths, and electric vehicle charging stations.</p> <p>Circular economy: The region has promoted the transition to a circular economy by supporting initiatives that reduce waste, increase resource efficiency, and promote sustainable consumption and production.</p>	<p>Increased regional cooperation: The integrated approach has fostered regional cooperation and partnerships, which have led to the development of joint projects and initiatives.</p> <p>Innovation and entrepreneurship: The smart specialization strategy has promoted innovation and entrepreneurship in the region, which has led to the creation of new businesses and jobs.</p> <p>Improved mobility and accessibility: The sustainable mobility initiatives have improved the quality of life of residents and visitors by promoting active transportation and reducing carbon emissions.</p> <p>Environmental sustainability: The circular economy initiatives have contributed to environmental sustainability by reducing waste and promoting the efficient use of resources.</p>
Negative Points	Relevant Projects
<p>Limited resources: The region faces limited financial and human resources, which may hinder the implementation of some projects and initiatives.</p> <p>Inequality and social exclusion: The benefits of regional development have not reached all residents equally, and some groups may face social exclusion and marginalization.</p> <p>Limited impact evaluation: The impact of some projects and initiatives on territorial cohesion and sustainability has not been systematically evaluated, which may hinder learning and improvement.</p> <p>Fragile natural environment: The region has a fragile natural environment, which may be threatened by some economic activities and development initiatives.</p>	<p>Rota do Românico: A cultural tourism route that showcases the Romanesque heritage of the region and promotes sustainable tourism.</p> <p>Tâmega e Sousa Cycling Route: A network of bike lanes and paths that connects the main cities and attractions of the region and promotes sustainable mobility.</p> <p>Smart Green Homes: An initiative that promotes the use of renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies in residential buildings.</p> <p>Fábrica do Futuro: A project that promotes innovation and entrepreneurship in the manufacturing sector through the development of digital technologies and advanced manufacturing techniques.</p> <p>Zero Waste Tâmega e Sousa: An initiative that promotes the transition to a circular economy by reducing waste, promoting reuse and recycling, and fostering sustainable consumption and production.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, based on fieldwork and interviews.

Another notable project is the construction of the Tâmega Hydroelectric Complex, which includes three new dams and two hydroelectric power plants. This project aims to increase the region's energy production and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, contributing to the transition towards a low-carbon economy. In addition, the region has also been developing projects to promote tourism and cultural heritage, such as the Route of the Romanesque and the Douro Valley Wine Region, which have contributed to the region's economic growth.

However, despite these positive developments, the Tâmega e Sousa region still faces several challenges. One of the main challenges is the low level of education and training among the population, which hinders the region's ability to attract and retain high-skilled

workers. Another challenge is the relatively low level of investment in research and development, which limits the region's capacity for innovation and competitiveness. Additionally, the region also faces social and demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and a high level of poverty and social exclusion.

#### 4.2. Jaén, Spain

The Jaén region in Spain has undergone significant changes in recent years. According to the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), the region's population has experienced a slight decline over the past decade, dropping from 657,421 inhabitants in 2011 to 633,564 in 2021. This trend is consistent with the overall demographic decline observed in rural and less developed regions across Spain.

Despite this, the region has been experiencing positive trends in economic development, with a steady growth in GDP. According to the latest data available from the INE, the GDP of the Jaén region increased by 3.3% in 2019 compared to the previous year, reaching EUR 7.5 billion. This growth was primarily driven by the agricultural sector, which accounts for a significant portion of the region's economic activity, and the construction and services sectors (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Territorial cohesion and sustainability in Jaén: main ideas.

Recent Trends	Positive Points
<p>High unemployment rates and depopulation in rural areas</p> <p>Promotion of renewable energy sources, particularly through the development of solar power plants. In 2020, the region had a total installed capacity of 2726 MW of solar energy, making it one of the leading regions in Spain in this area. This has helped to reduce the region's reliance on fossil fuels and contribute to the country's energy transition goals.</p> <p>Development of rural tourism which has helped to diversify the region's economy and create new employment opportunities. The region has a rich cultural and natural heritage, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Renaissance Monumental Ensemble of Úbeda and Baeza. Rural tourism has been promoted through various policies and programs, including the Rural Development Program and the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism.</p>	<p>The promotion of renewable energy has helped to reduce the region's carbon footprint and contribute to Spain's energy transition goals.</p> <p>The development of rural tourism has helped to diversify the region's economy and create new employment opportunities. The region has made progress in promoting sustainable development and territorial cohesion through various policies and programs.</p> <p>The region has collaborated with national and international partners, including the European Union, to implement its policies and programs.</p>
Negative Points	Relevant Projects
<p>The region still faces significant economic and social challenges, including high unemployment rates and depopulation in rural areas.</p> <p>Some policies and programs may not have been implemented effectively or efficiently, leading to limited impact.</p> <p>The region may face difficulties in attracting investment and funding for its policies and programs.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the region's economy and may have slowed progress in implementing its policies and programs.</p>	<p>The Andalusian Network of Intelligent Cities (RECAI) aims to promote sustainable urban development and improve the quality of life of citizens in the region.</p> <p>The Rural Development Program provides funding for projects related to rural tourism, renewable energy, and other areas.</p> <p>The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism aims to promote sustainable tourism practices in the region and improve the competitiveness of its tourism industry.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, based on fieldwork and interviews.

In recent years, the Jaén region has been the subject of numerous public policies and projects aimed at promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability [58–61]. These policies have focused on improving the region's infrastructure, promoting economic diversification, and preserving its natural and cultural heritage. Among the most significant initiatives undertaken are the development of a regional smart specialization strategy, the promotion of renewable energy projects, and the establishment of rural development programs to support local agriculture and tourism.



Despite these positive developments, the Jaén region faces significant challenges, including a high unemployment rate and a low level of education among its population. The region also suffers from a lack of access to certain public services and a significant urban–rural divide. These challenges require further attention from policymakers to ensure that the region can continue to develop in a sustainable and equitable manner.

#### 4.3. Province of Avellino, Italy

The Province of Avellino, located in the Campania region of Italy, has experienced several trends in recent years. In terms of demographic changes, the province's population has been declining steadily, with a decrease of 1.7% between 2011 and 2021. This trend is attributed to a combination of factors, including a low birth rate, an aging population, and migration to other regions. Despite this, the province still has a relatively high population density compared to other Italian provinces.

In terms of economic trends, the Province of Avellino has a diversified economy, with a mix of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, and services. The province's GDP has also been growing steadily in recent years, with a 3.3% increase in 2019 compared to the previous year. However, the province still faces economic challenges, including a high unemployment rate, particularly among young people, and a relatively low GDP per capita compared to the national average (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Territorial cohesion and sustainability in Province of Avellino: main ideas.

Recent Trends	Positive Points
<p>Demographics: A declining population due to low birth rates and out-migration, with aging problems and a decreasing workforce.</p> <p>Economy: A relatively low GDP compared to other regions in Italy, a high percentage of the workforce employed in the services sector, particularly in healthcare and social services, and a growing interest in developing the tourism industry, particularly in the wine and food sectors.</p> <p>Environment: Increased attention to sustainability and eco-tourism, with a focus on preserving natural resources such as forests and waterways.</p>	<p>The Province of Avellino has implemented policies to promote sustainable tourism, with a focus on cultural heritage and natural resources.</p> <p>The region has implemented policies to support entrepreneurship and innovation, with a focus on the development of local industries and technologies.</p> <p>The Province of Avellino has promoted social inclusion and community engagement through various initiatives, including the development of social enterprises and cooperatives.</p> <p>The region has invested in the development of renewable energy sources, with a focus on solar and wind power.</p>
Negative Points	Relevant Projects
<p>The Province of Avellino continues to face challenges in attracting and retaining businesses and skilled workers, which has contributed to the decline in GDP.</p> <p>The region has struggled to effectively address environmental challenges, including air and water pollution.</p> <p>The Province of Avellino has faced challenges in promoting sustainable agriculture, which remains an important economic sector in the region.</p> <p>The region has faced challenges in addressing social inequality and providing adequate social services, particularly for vulnerable populations.</p>	<p>“Avellino Creative City”: A project aimed at promoting the cultural heritage and creative industries of the province, with a focus on promoting sustainable tourism and economic development.</p> <p>“Green Avellino”: A project aimed at promoting the development of renewable energy sources and reducing carbon emissions in the region.</p> <p>“Agricultural and forestry system of the Irpinia district”: A project aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry practices in the region.</p> <p>“Social Enterprise Network”: A project aimed at promoting social entrepreneurship and the development of social enterprises in the Province of Avellino.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, based on fieldwork and interviews.

In terms of sustainability, the Province of Avellino [62–64] has been implementing several initiatives aimed at promoting environmental protection and renewable energy. These include the development of sustainable tourism, the promotion of organic farming, and the installation of photovoltaic panels on public buildings. However, the province also faces environmental challenges, including air pollution and inadequate waste management infrastructure.

Overall, the Province of Avellino has shown some positive trends in terms of economic growth and sustainability initiatives, but still faces challenges in terms of population decline, unemployment, and environmental issues.

## 5. Discussion

Tâmega e Sousa, Jaén, and the Province of Avellino are three territories in Europe that have implemented various public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability. While there are similarities and differences among these territories, some of the key similarities and differences in terms of the effectiveness of their policies can be identified.

In terms of similarities, all three territories have experienced challenges related to economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Despite these challenges, they have implemented various public policies and initiatives to address these issues. Additionally, all three territories have used a territorial approach to regional development, which involves tailoring policies to specific regions and their needs. The use of this approach is intended to foster greater territorial cohesion and sustainability.

One difference between these territories is their level of economic development. For example, the GDP per capita in Tâmega e Sousa is lower than in Jaén and the Province of Avellino. This may influence the types of policies and initiatives that are implemented in each region, as well as the resources that are available to support these efforts.

Another difference is the specific focus of their policies and initiatives. For example, Tâmega e Sousa has focused on the development of creative industries and tourism, while Jaén has focused on the promotion of renewable energy and sustainable agriculture. The Province of Avellino, on the other hand, has focused on the development of its cultural and historical heritage as a means of promoting economic development and tourism.

A third difference is the level of political support and participation in policy-making processes. For example, Tâmega e Sousa has emphasized the importance of involving citizens and local stakeholders in policy-making processes through participatory budgeting and other initiatives. Jaén, on the other hand, has experienced challenges related to political fragmentation and a lack of coordinated efforts among various stakeholders. In the Province of Avellino, there have been efforts to involve citizens and local stakeholders in policy-making processes through participatory planning and other initiatives.

Despite these similarities and differences, all three territories have made progress in implementing policies and initiatives that promote territorial cohesion and sustainability. For example, in Tâmega e Sousa, the implementation of policies and initiatives focused on creative industries and tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists visiting the region and the creation of new jobs. In Jaén, the promotion of renewable energy and sustainable agriculture has led to the creation of new businesses and job opportunities. In the Province of Avellino, efforts to develop cultural and historical heritage have led to increased tourism and economic growth.

However, there are also challenges and obstacles that these territories have faced in their efforts to promote territorial cohesion and sustainability. For example, all three territories have experienced challenges related to the availability of financial resources to support policy implementation. Additionally, there have been challenges related to political fragmentation, lack of coordination among stakeholders, and a lack of institutional capacity to implement policies effectively.

Based on the text, it can be inferred that the promotion of territorial cohesion is a key objective of public policies and initiatives in Tâmega e Sousa, Jaén, and the Province of Avellino. All three territories have implemented policies and initiatives that are tailored to their specific needs in order to foster greater territorial cohesion and sustainability. They have also emphasized the importance of involving citizens and local stakeholders in policy-making processes, in order to ensure that policies are effectively implemented and meet the needs of the community.

In conclusion, Tâmega e Sousa, Jaén, and the Province of Avellino are three territories in Europe that have implemented various public policies and initiatives to promote territo-

rial cohesion and sustainability. While there are similarities and differences among these territories, they have all faced challenges related to economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, and have used a territorial approach to regional development to address these challenges. Despite progress made in promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability, there are still challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed in order to ensure the effectiveness of these policies and initiatives.

## 6. Conclusions

Considering all the information presented on public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability, it is clear that there has been a significant effort by the European Union and its member states to promote sustainable and balanced regional development. However, despite these efforts, there are still several challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed.

One of the main challenges is the lack of coordination and cooperation among different levels of government and stakeholders. While there have been several programs and initiatives aimed at promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability, their effectiveness is often limited by the absence of a comprehensive and integrated approach that involves all relevant actors.

Another challenge is the need to ensure that these policies and programs are tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each region. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be successful, and it is important to take into account the unique economic, social, and environmental circumstances of each region.

In terms of positive points, it is clear that public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability have had a significant impact on many regions, promoting economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. In particular, the adoption of smart specialization strategies and the use of innovative technologies have helped to boost innovation and competitiveness in many regions.

However, there are also negative points that must be addressed. One of the main concerns is the sustainability of these policies in the long term, as many programs and initiatives are heavily dependent on external funding sources. Additionally, there is a need to ensure that these policies are implemented in a way that is socially and environmentally responsible, avoiding negative impacts on local communities and ecosystems.

Overall, the effectiveness of public policies for territorial cohesion and sustainability depends on several factors, including political will, stakeholder engagement, and the availability of resources. While progress has been made in many regions, there is still much work to be done to ensure that these policies are effective, sustainable, and inclusive. Based on the information presented, we can suggest some recommendations for public policies and research on territorial cohesion and sustainability:

- Promote a territorial approach: Territorial approaches to regional development and smart specialization can be effective tools for promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability. Policymakers should consider adopting these approaches when designing and implementing policies.
- Address regional disparities: Regional disparities remain a significant challenge in promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability. Policymakers should prioritize policies that target areas experiencing economic and social deprivation.
- Emphasize sustainable development: Sustainable development should be at the heart of all policies aimed at promoting territorial cohesion. Policies should be designed to ensure that economic growth and social progress are achieved in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- Foster collaboration: Collaboration between different levels of government, public and private actors, and civil society is crucial for promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability. Policymakers should facilitate dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders.
- Monitor and evaluate policies: Monitoring and evaluating policies is critical to assessing their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments. Policymakers should

prioritize monitoring and evaluation to ensure that policies are achieving their intended outcomes.

- Invest in research: Research is crucial for identifying best practices and developing evidence-based policies. Policymakers should invest in research on territorial cohesion and sustainability to ensure that policies are based on the latest knowledge and evidence.

Overall, promoting territorial cohesion and sustainability requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves various stakeholders and addresses regional disparities. Policymakers should prioritize policies that are based on a territorial approach, emphasize sustainable development, foster collaboration, and invest in research and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of their policies.

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