

STRATEGIC AND TERRITORIAL ALIGNMENT: TOWARDS A STRONGER EFFICIENCY IN THE ARTICULATION BETWEEN EU COHESION POLICY AND SPATIAL PLANNING IN PORTUGAL**Paulo Neto**

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The articulation between Portugal's spatial planning instruments and the territorial instruments of the European Union's Cohesion Policy remains a complex challenge. Despite the existence of multiple regulatory and strategic frameworks at both national and European levels, there is still a lack of effective integration between the objectives of spatial planning and the financial and operational mechanisms of Cohesion Policy. This misalignment results in inefficiencies in territorial governance, difficulties in coordinating investments, and missed opportunities for maximizing the impact of EU funding on regional development.

This paper explores how Portugal can enhance the strategic and functional articulation between these instruments to improve territorial governance and economic efficiency. First, it examines the current structure of Portuguese spatial planning, highlighting the main instruments and their role in guiding public and private investments. Second, it assesses the territorial tools of the EU Cohesion Policy, such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), evaluating their effectiveness in aligning with national planning priorities.

The paper then identifies key gaps in coordination, including regulatory inconsistencies, governance fragmentation, and insufficient strategic coherence between national and EU frameworks. Through a comparative analysis of best practices in other EU member states, it proposes policy recommendations for improving alignment, such as stronger multi-level governance mechanisms, enhanced data integration for territorial decision-making, and the development of adaptive planning frameworks that respond dynamically to regional needs.

The findings suggest that a more integrated approach to territorial planning and Cohesion Policy implementation would lead to better-targeted investments, increased efficiency in resource allocation, and a more sustainable regional development trajectory. This research contributes to the ongoing debate on post-2030 Cohesion Policy reforms, emphasizing the importance of ensuring stronger synergies between national planning systems and EU territorial policies.

Keywords | Cohesion Policy, spatial planning, territorial governance, EU funding, regional development.