

FROM SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIES: ENHANCING WELL-BEING AND PURPOSE IN THE POST-2030 COHESION POLICY

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Abstract

The ongoing transition towards a sustainable development model in Europe calls for a rethinking of how territorial planning and the European Union's Cohesion Policy interact to address contemporary challenges. In this context, this paper proposes an integrated perspective that connects sustainable territorial planning with the internal social responsibility practices of organizations, focusing on well-being, purpose, and inclusive development. Drawing from the Portuguese experience, particularly the Alentejo region, we argue that the future Cohesion Policy (post-2030) must not only address structural territorial inequalities but also actively foster social cohesion within organizations and communities.

This contribution is based on mixed methods research, combining evidence from previous studies on corporate social responsibility, well-being, and organizational purpose in Portuguese organizations, with insights from a multi-case study conducted in the Alentejo region. The findings demonstrate that internal social responsibility practices—such as promoting well-being, fostering meaningful work, and adapting to remote and hybrid work models—are directly linked to territorial sustainability. They contribute to attracting and retaining talent, revitalizing rural and peripheral areas, and promoting a stronger sense of belonging and purpose in both organizations and communities. The paper advocates for a renewed paradigm where spatial planning and cohesion policy instruments integrate these social dimensions more explicitly. This approach enhances the capacity of territorial policies to generate not only economic and environmental benefits but also social value, reinforcing the Agenda 2030 objectives. The paper presents concrete policy recommendations for the Portuguese context, proposing innovative governance mechanisms and funding strategies that link social responsibility practices, sustainable development, and territorial resilience.

The results are particularly relevant for regions like Alentejo, which face demographic challenges, limited economic diversification, and social inequalities. By combining territorial planning with organizational practices that value human well-being and purpose, it is possible to foster inclusive, cohesive, and sustainable territories aligned with the priorities of the European Union's post-2030 Cohesion Policy.

Keywords | Sustainable Territorial Planning, Cohesion Policy, Social Responsibility, Well-being, Purpose, Territorial Resilience, Agenda 2030.