

Services of General Interest and Territorial Cohesion:

What, How and by Whom?

Daniel Rauhut a & David Ludlow b

Abstract

Services of General Interest (SGI) are a heterogeneous group of services for which the EU Member States are primarily responsible. Territorial Cohesion is a vague political concept aiming at creating a balanced distribution of economic and social resources among the European regions in order to promote competitiveness and sustainable growth. This paper aims to discuss how territorial cohesion policy is implemented in the area of services of general interest.

As SGI are in the domain of the Member States and Territorial Cohesion is a fuzzy concept to implement, problems will inevitably occur in attempts to pursue objectives of territorial cohesion in relation to services of general interest. This is particularly the case as there is no capability at the European level to directly steer implementation by the member states. As a consequence the potential to successfully implement territorial cohesion policy objectives under these conditions is low. Indeed goal conflicts may exist between the member States' objectives in relation to SGI and EU ambitions to implement Territorial Cohesion policy. However, it is also argued that, the emerging new dynamic generated from top-down processes (multi-scale integrated management), aligned with the bottom-up process (stakeholder engagement and decision-making support) offers a renewed potential to drive the implementation of the pan-European concept of SGI.

Keywords: Territorial Cohesion, Services of General Interest, Implementation

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