

To: European Commission DG Regional Policy

Consultation on the Green Paper
on Territorial Cohesion



Comments from the NSPA Network

Friday, February 27, 2009

This document represents the viewpoints from the NSPA network for the Consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion. The NSPA network for Northern Sparsely Populated Areas represents close collaboration between the regional offices of the four northernmost counties of **Sweden** (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Västernorrland); the seven northernmost and eastern regions of **Finland** (Lapland, Oulu, Central Ostrobothnia, Kainuu, North Karelia, North Savo and South Savo); and of North **Norway** (Troms, Nordland).

The Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA) of Finland, Sweden and Norway, has a population density of only 4.9 inhabitants per km², something that cannot be found in any other part of the European Union (Nordregio 2005:4). The NSPA of Finland and Sweden comprise an area of 429,970 km² with a population of 2,185,000 people. Furthermore, North Norway comprises an area of 135,340 km² with a population of 591,470 people (4.3 inhabitants per km²).

Representatives from our regions have independently submitted their comprehensive viewpoints, in addition to this we would like to highlight the key considerations from the NSPA as a whole.

Those submissions include:

- Europaforum, North Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Västernorrland)
- Fylkesrådet, Troms fylkeskommune, North Norway
- Nordland and Troms County Councils, Norway

INTRODUCTION

EU cohesion policy has contributed considerably to economic and social development in the NSPA region as well as other EU regions. NSPA supports a strong future cohesion policy for sustainable development, competitiveness and employment in the European Union.

NSPA agrees with territorial cohesion being joined to European Union regional policy objectives for economic and social cohesion. NSPA also welcomes the invitation to dialogue initiated by the European Commission.

NSPA considers that territorial cohesion is an approach permeating all policy design, with consideration given to specific territorial geographical conditions and potentials, the interplay between different policy areas and cooperation between different levels of governance and decision-making. NSPA feels that territorial cohesion has to cover all actions, legislation and measures at EU level, national level, regional, and local level.

Strengthening the territorial perspective in cohesion policy, with consideration given to the specific conditions of a territory and the development of its potential and strength, does not only contribute to the development of that territory, but also to that of the entire EU. It strengthens not only the objectives of the Lisbon strategy, but also those set for cohesion policy by the

European Union. By starting out from the potential of a territory and the territorial diversity of the Union, together with the ambition of balanced development in the entire Union, cohesion among EU regions and countries is strengthened at the same time as it contributes to global EU competitiveness.

NSPA considers that actions taken within the framework of territorial cohesion policy should act for a sustainable development of all parts of the European Union. This is of significant importance with a continued focus on areas defined by geographical characteristics – such regions, for example, that consist of geographically and demographically exposed regions, like regions in NSPA with sparsely populated areas, long distances and a barren climate. The need for particular actions in these areas is indicated by Protocol 6 of the Accession Treaty for Sweden, Finland and Austria, and article 174 of the Lisbon Treaty underlines that particular attention shall be directed towards regions with severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps, such as the northernmost regions with a very sparse population, cross-border regions and mountain regions. NSPA considers that it is important for the specific territorial conditions and the development potential of the NSPA region to be at the focus of policy development, development strategies and actions at all levels of governance.

DIALOGUE AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

In order to guarantee the principle of subsidiarity the NSPA finds it of importance for the regional level to participate in planning, programming and implementing future territorial cohesion policies.

In order to better develop territorial cohesion, it is necessary to develop multi-level governance. The EU community, the nation and the regional and local level formulate goals together and elaborate strategies for the responsibility of each level for their implementation. The system of Community Strategic Guidelines, national strategies for competitiveness and employment, and regional development strategies represent a good basis for this work.

NSPA considers that territorial cohesion requires that its measures are placed above sector-developing measures, the reason being that planning according to sector often leads to difficulties with reaching overall political objectives because every sector tends to see to its own goals. Sector policy hence prevents territorial cohesion to a large extent.

The NPSA sees territorial cohesion as a question not only for DG Regional Policy, but also for other general directorates, for example Transport, Environment, Agriculture and Rural development. The Commission can and ought to support territorial cohesion with cohesive administration in all policy areas.

PERIPHERAL DEVELOPMENT

In order to achieve a continued strong European development also outside the so-called Pentagon, it is of great importance for territorial cohesion policy to guarantee actions that meet the needs of e.g. competence and workforce supply, research and development, innovation, commercialisation and entrepreneurship, as the needs surrounding these areas are shaped by the particular prevailing conditions in the specific regions.

Polycentric development as a tool for development outside of the Pentagon needs to be adjusted to also include the northern parts of Europe, taking relative levels of development into account.

BALTIC SEA AND COMMUNICATION

NSPA wants to stress the importance of deriving advantages from synergies that can be obtained from a more effective coordination between development programmes/strategies introduced in the EU, such as in the Baltic Sea Strategy.

Actions are required that support higher education, research, innovation including commercialisation, infrastructural investments including improved cross-connection within the Baltic region, as well as an infrastructure for IT/telecommunications. All these actions can be coordinated towards the implementation of actions within the framework of future territorial cohesion policy.

NSPA considers therefore that it is of great importance for future territorial cohesion policies to respect the need for actions required to increase functionality between districts in sparsely populated parts of Northern Europe.

It is of great importance for territorial cohesion policy not only to become a policy for territorial cooperation within central areas of the EU, but to also have a North-South dimension throughout. Therefore NSPA wants to underline once more the importance for cohesion policy to ensure actions that give the NSPA region a chance to strengthen its role as a territorially cohesive part of Europe despite its peripheral location.

INDICATORS

NSPA wants to emphasize the importance of carefully selecting measuring indicators, at local or regional level. Too coarse data sometimes means the vast variations between regions are not made evident.

There is great importance in indicators that show population trends, access to infrastructure/communications and education, emergence of employment market regions, development trends in the form of cluster development, competitiveness, emergence of research, innovation and company formation. By tradition, the NSPA region has had a strong raw materials industry which is of great importance for the entire EU, and it is also at the leading edge in creative industries and research-intensive activities, for example. All these development trends are important to monitor.

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