EXPLORING THE TERRITORIAL CAPITAL, GLOBAL COMPETITION AND TERRITORIAL COHESION POLICY: A SWOT ANALYSIS OF SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST

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Alina Elena Iosif is an assistant at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies (BAES) in Bucharest, Romania. She recently defended her thesis in the field of Business Administration within BAES, and was financed by a scholarship from European funds throughout her doctoral programme. She has been invited to become a visiting researcher within the University of Barcelona, Spain. Alina Elena Iosif has also been a project member within the South-East Programme and is involved in the SeGI project, participating with ESPON financing. Her research interests focus on public – private cooperation, services of general interest and regional development.

Abstract
In line with Europe 2020 Strategy the starting point of this article is the special significance of the services of general interest (SGI) to the territorial cohesion concept: ensuring the proper provision of SGI in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and adaptability to special needs stand at the very origin of this concept. From another perspective, regional competition and territorial cohesion are strongly related to the territorial capital of each area, describing all localized assets that determine the competitive potential of a given territory. SGI meet the approaches to territorial capital when discussions concentrate on location, agglomeration economies, local resources, quality of life, welfare regime, subsidiarity principle, etc. This paper proposes an inquiry into the impact of territorial capital and territorial cohesion policy on the SGI in the context of global competition, providing a SWOT analysis based on the basic trends and key challenges in demographic, economic, social, climate-environmental and political terms. It may be employed as a
useful tool to underlie the policies aiming at an effective provision of SGI to the large variety of territories existing within the EU.

Key-words: SGI, territorial capital, cohesion policy, global competition
JEL Classification: R10

**Introduction**

In the enlarged European Union the complex problems faced by its territories have required an integrated approach seeking to combine economic effectiveness, social cohesion and economic balance, which has resulted in a new, third component of the post-2013 cohesion policy, namely the territorial cohesion. It aims to find solutions able to capitalize on the strengths of each territory, to manage concentration, to better connect territories and develop the cooperation between them (European Commission, 2012).

In accordance with the priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Territorial Agenda 2020 the “territorial keys” meant to add value to the territorial dimension of the development policy refer to accessibility, services of general interest, territorial capacities, city networking and functional regions (Lindblat, 2011).

Thus, both regional identities and the place-based approach are promoted by the territorial cohesion, suggesting a series of action directions such as a functional perspective on the integrated development of territories, the cross-sectoral co-ordination of policies and the multi-level governance from local to European, the cooperation between territories and the improvement of knowledge so as to guide a proper development (European Commission, 2012).

In the current global context, characterized by austerity and environmental constraints, certain spatial economic outcomes are expected as a result of applying the territorial cohesion. It concentrates on the smart growth in a competitive and polycentric Europe, the inclusive, balanced development and fair access to services, the recognition of the territorial diversity and of the importance of local development conditions and the protection of geographic specificities (Adams, Cotella and Nunes, 2010; Dabinett, 2011).

Though, even if the concept of territorial cohesion is supposed to become functional in the next programming period, 2014-2020, the analysts have identified three successive tests that have not been passed yet by the “battle” for territorial cohesion (Jouen, 2008). First, specific constraints or benefits need to be imposed in order to restore the balance in favour of certain territories. Second, the level of policy-making competency required for such interventions has to be justified in relation...
to the added value for the EU or other actors, at the same time with respecting the subsidiarity principle. Third, the validity of a new regulatory or financial framework is challenged, as well as the scope of a possible compensation for disadvantaged territories.

One of the possible responses envisages an effective territorial governance, as a pre-requisite for strengthening the territorial cohesion. From this perspective EU sectoral and economic policies as well as the territorial development policies in the EU Member States “need to reinforce each other in order to secure effective exploitation of Europe’s territorial capital […]” (MUDTCEU, 2007, p.74). In addition, the “good governance” principle is invoked as an indispensable need for redefining the quality of vertical and horizontal relations of public action as a result of its intrinsic territorial dimension (Janin Rivolin, 2010).

Based on these overall considerations this paper aims to discuss the role of the services of general interest in relation to territorial capital, as a key contribution to strengthening the territorial cohesion in the current global competition context. It is organized in three main sections, as follows: First, an inquiry into territorial cohesion and competitiveness issues is proposed from the perspective of the global competition. Second, the territorial capital response to the challenges of territorial cohesion is examined in relation to the role of the services of general interest in achieving this goal. Third, a SWOT analysis is performed aiming to reveal the impact of territorial capital and territorial cohesion policy on services of general interest in the context of global competition.

**Territorial cohesion and competitiveness in the context of global competition**

As a fundamental concern of regional planning and ‘raison d’être’ for regional development policy (Hubner, 2007) the EU territorial cohesion can be addressed as a “complex umbrella concept” (Böhme et al., 2011, p.9), which covers:

- flows and connectivity (networks, functional areas, services of general interest);
- spatial nodes (settlement structure, clusters, economies of agglomeration);
- maritime and terrestrial macro-geographical space use and organization (e.g. ecosystems);
- territorial assets e.g. institutional set-up, cultural landscapes, identity and integrity, etc.” (Böhme et al., 2011, p.9).

According to the EU regulations, territorial cohesion objectives are reflected by the territorial dimension of the Cohesion Policy as well as by other components of the EU policy, especially the provision of services of general interest (European Union, 2008), being a shared responsibility of the EU and its member states. In a place-based approach advocated by the Territorial Agenda 2020 territorial cohesion is closely related to horizontal coordination and integrated functional area development, so as to contribute, via multi-level governance, to increasing competitiveness of
Territorial competitiveness is a very challenging issue in the context of a growing competition at national, European and global scale. In an extremely interconnected world, markets are permanently changing their conditions. Thus, the present situation can be characterized by a global market with a powerful impact on the development of countries and, more important, on regions. “Businesses routinely buy from, and sell to, foreign counterparts, companies form alliances and merge across national borders, and the resulting multinationals freely roam the world” (Tay and Willmann, 2005, p. 312), leading to a global competition on the marketplace. As world developed, changes in “the structure of retailing in towns and in the industrial structure in general, in economic fundamentals” (Anderson and de Palma, 2000, p. 423) and also in the social, political, demographic etc. environments have arisen. This way, competition has evolved from a local one to a global one and regions have played a key role in this process. Moreover, one of the most important trends at present points out the increasing role of regions in the global competition, compared to the role of countries (ESPON, 2005; Constantin, 2012). Regions may be in competition with one another and, at the same time, they can be part of a global competition context – for access to the global market, to capital, to new technologies, to innovation, to new ideas and knowledge, and even to human resources.

Approaching regions from the angle of regional competition and in the context of the global competition is mainly based on the relationship between the region characteristics – such as dimension, geographical features, level of economic development, the type of economic agents active in the region, demographic features etc. and the connection between them – and the significant elements of the competition – such as firms survival or development, raising the living standards of the citizens, population growth, decrease in emigration, reduction of unemployment, raising the local income, creating economic prosperity, stimulating entrepreneurship, generating new jobs, raising the level of education, etc. (Batay and Friedrich, 2000).

Also, this subject has to be addressed in relation to territorial cohesion. According to Damsgaard (2011), global competition facilitates and amplifies “the relocation of economic activities mainly due to rapid development of advanced technologies and significant markets in emerging economies” (p. 18). As previously stated, global competition is also manifested between regions, the most competitive ones being those that are capable to respond to globalisation in an efficient and effective way by capitalizing territorial cohesion elements. Thus, the winners are those that develop their territory in an equilibrate manner, those that reduce the disparities and those that use and capitalize their territorial potential and advantages.

From this perspective all components of the Europe 2020 Strategy – smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – can be associated a territorial dimension, expressing the development
opportunities of various regions. Thus, regional planners address smart growth in terms of economies of agglomeration, local development milieu, social capital, connectivity options, etc., proposing policy actions aiming at well organised urban regions, mutually connected, increased access to knowledge, education and business support services, knowledge-intensive clusters, functional regions, and so on. In order to ensure sustainable growth, territorial policies envisage securing space for renewable resources, supporting sustainable development of cities, with a clear emphasis on urban sprawl, promoting environmental-friendly transport. Inclusive growth implies at territorial level the attracting of lagging areas in development process, support to small and medium cities so as to offer the necessary skills and jobs, rural economies diversification, which means, in policy terms, fair access to services of general interest, promoting accessibility for small and medium cities and enlarging their functional areas and labour markets, etc. (Böhme et al., 2011).

In the same register, the provision of a minimum or basic level of services of general interest should be also considered. “All of the actors in a community (individuals / enterprises / organizations) have different needs and considering the changes on different effects, functions, concepts etc. it can be assessed that a certain range and level of SGI provision, varying across the territory, would be necessary for the proper functioning and development of different local communities and regions.” (Littke and Rauhut, 2013, p. 5) In addition, “the concept of a basic level of SGI may refer to the types of service provided as well as to what should be regarded as a minimum acceptable level of supply and accessibility within each type of service, in order to satisfy the specified requirements of universal access” (Bjørnsen, Foss, Johansen and Langset, 2012).

Such a complex and dynamic environment will generate an increasing regional and global competition, continuously displaying winners and losers. Depending on the time interval and spatial scale of analysis an important distinction should be made between absolute and relative winners (and losers) (Nijkamp, 1997; ESPON, 2012), emphasizing the need of identifying the distinctive features of a territory whose value can be enhanced and transformed into clear competitive advantages. Consequently, the development of growth strategies for regions, cities, territories must consider the existing local assets and potentials and their full exploitation, which is increasingly addressed as ‘territorial capital’ (Camagni, 2008).

In order to illustrate the above statement, the next section proposes a discussion on territorial capital in relation to one of the key elements envisaged by the territorial cohesion, namely services of general interest.
The territorial capital response. Role of services of general interest

The concept of territorial capital was first proposed by OECD (2001), being reiterated by DG Regio of Commission of the European Union in relation to the policies addressing territorial development: “Territorial development policies (policies with a territorial approach to development) should first and foremost help areas to develop their territorial capital” (CEC, 2005, p.1).

In a broad sense, territorial capital may be seen as “the set of localized assets – natural, human, artificial, organizational, relational and cognitive – that constitute the competitive potential of a given territory” (Camagni and Capello, 2011, p.216). It incorporates “natural resources and social overhead capital, impure public goods or mixed public/private goods (…) (landscape, cultural heritage), agglomeration and district externalities, club goods such as proprietary networks, private fixed capital stock and relational private services, social and relational capital, human capital, entrepreneurship, creativity and leadership, cooperation networks and strategic public private partnerships in knowledge creation, governance structures” (Camagni and Capello, 2011, pp. 216-217).

Territorial capital elements may be structured into several components of a model describing the regional growth process. They mainly refer to territorial assets (found in economy – research and development, human capital, economic geography and territorial – urban structures – presence of large agglomerations, accessibility and peripherality), relationality (spatial spillover effects), agglomeration economies (in relation to urban structure and polycentrism), accessibility and connectivity (via market potential functions), governance and institutional effects, etc. (Camagni, 2008). All these components are considered by the policies aiming to support regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion.

If the services of general interest (SGI) are considered, the purpose of harmonizing the EU places through territorial cohesion can be achieved by making SGI accessible to all areas, including the remote ones. SGI stand at the very origin of the territorial cohesion concept. They have been initially defined as “market and non-market services which public authorities class as being of economic interest and subject to specific public service obligations” (CEC, 2001, p.23). The main emphasis in this field is put on the users of SGI, namely the European citizens, who “expect high quality services at affordable prices” (CEC, 2001, p. 6). At present SGI incorporate social services of general interest such as labour market services, education, health care, child care, social care, (social) housing and social assistance services as well as services of general economic interest, which refer to gas, water, electricity, postal service, transport, waste management, ICT and electronic communications (Rauhut and Ludlow, 2012). In line with Europe 2020 Strategy, some of these services support the smart long run growth (e.g. education), while others are particularly
important to sustainable growth (e.g. energy, waste management) or to inclusive growth (e.g. social care).

SGI meet the approaches to territorial capital when it comes to issues regarding location, natural resources, quality of life and actors working together. From the territorial impact viewpoint, SGI can be divided into three groups (Balalia and Rauhut, 2012). The first group – so-called ‘explicit group’ - includes transport, electricity, gas, water, postal services and waste management. The second group, of ‘partial impact’ envisages ICT and telecommunications, tertiary education and health care while the third – lacking spatial component – comprises labour market services, elderly care, child care and social housing. Hence, according to this classification, in the context of crossing the territorial capital with the territorial dimension of SGI, the discussion would concentrate on the SGI that are identifiable in a certain territory, namely the SGI which are included in the explicit group. Lower significance from this viewpoint could be brought about by the SGI that are part of the partial impact group and it would be almost a challenge to find common points with SGI that are lacking spatial dimension.

Another discussion concentrates on the relationship between the provision of SGI and territorial structures – monocentric, polycentric. It implies a comparison between “densely and sparsely population structures and their preconditions to economise with restricted resources” (Borges and Johansson, 2012, p.4). In other words, whether the polycentric countries, characterized by more densely and spread population structure benefit from more SGI per capita than the sparsely populated, monocentric systems, characterized by rather concentrated settlement patterns with a few dominant big cities. The results of corresponding inquiries indicate that “connections between polycentricity/monocentricity and SGI are almost negligible” (Borges and Johansson, 2012, p.13) but emphasize the need of further investigations with regard to the relation between territorial development based on polycentric structures and welfare systems, considering the special significance of the latter for SGI and territorial cohesion.

Going further, whereas the territorial capital is associated with a certain territory, it is more difficult to determine the clear limits of the SGI within the same area. Some of SGI generate benefits beyond the border using the capital available within a certain territory (positive spatial externalities). On the other hand, as not all territories dispose of the same capital, differences in the competitive potential appear, determining territorial variations in the provision of SGI. In response to this situation the applying of proportionality principle with regard to the investment in territorial capital is recommended, so as to diminish the differences between regions in terms of SGI provision. The proportionality principle goes hand in hand with the applying of the subsidiarity principle, which
has made it necessary and possible to formally recognize local and regional authorities as integral parts of the Community structure (European Union, 2007).

In addition, different types of territories need different accessibility standards for SGI. Therefore the vast array of policies designed for the provision of SGI should have a territorial dimension and be coordinated with specific EU and national policies (e.g. transport, ICT) in order to ensure the broad and comprehensive accessibility to SGI for the general public (Böhme et al., 2011). A special responsibility belongs to the national governments, especially when it comes to the minimum provision of SGI in economically and demographically disadvantaged regions (ESPON, 2012). In a broader view, the European Commission’s vision on SGI in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and adaptability to special needs implies the leading role of the state, accompanied by the market related advantages and complemented by the civic engagement in special situations. The EU supports all these efforts via programmes funded by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund, revealing a complex SGI provision architecture (ESPON, 2012), which has to be integrated in and connected to the components of the Cohesion Policy.

Consequently, the clear, objective evaluation of the opportunities and challenges to SGI derived from the economic, social, demographic, spatial elements involved in applying various policy measures is necessary. With this aim in view a SWOT analysis has been performed, seeking to identify the impact of territorial capital and territorial cohesion policy on SGI in the context of global competition.

A SWOT analysis of the SGI in relation to territorial capital and territorial cohesion policy in the context of globalization

This analysis has been performed considering the SGI scope and drivers in relation to the basic trends and key challenges in demographic, economic, social, climate-environmental and political terms, which laid the foundations of the normative and, especially, explorative scenarios regarding the competitive Europe, social Europe and green Europe (Table 1).
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<th>Territorial capital</th>
<th>Global competition</th>
<th>Policy on territorial cohesion</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td>- high quality of SGI in regions of high expertise</td>
<td>- high-quality SGI driven by competitiveness in SGI provision</td>
<td>- EU funds for new investments in SGI</td>
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<td>- stable demand for / and supply of SGI</td>
<td>- reorientation towards new renewable source (eg: geothermal energy allows cheaper access to energy)</td>
<td>- various policy approaches to SGI applied by the EU Member States focusing on redistribution, fostering efficiency, privatisation of public services, and so on</td>
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<td>- low prices of SGI in territories of SGI concentration and high competition</td>
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<td>- long-term trend of increasing levels of public spending as proportion of GDP in the 90s and the beginning of 2000s</td>
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<td>- clustering of SGI providers in densely populated and urban areas</td>
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<td>- liberalization and deregulation in various areas of SGI as a result of EU directives, in some cases leading to the development of different forms of public-private partnerships</td>
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<td>- cooperation between different SGI providers</td>
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<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
<td>- clear concentration tendencies in remote, sparsely populated, mountainous, insular and outmost regions towards major towns and city</td>
<td>- the European economy more closely linked to changes in the global context, including global policies</td>
<td>- incoherent policies at the various levels generating trade-offs and additional economic, social and environmental costs</td>
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<td>- significant cut-backs in the</td>
<td>- centralisation of services in various dimensions in Europe</td>
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Table 1. A SWOT analysis of SGI
agglomerations creating imbalances in SGI provision
- low / lack of SGI provision in less attractive territories from a market perspective
- peripheral, sparsely populated regions experiencing population decline and often facing significant problems in maintaining service standards or in terms of financing

provision of SGI – not only in already disadvantaged regions, but in all regions (especially in most affected countries) as a results of the global economic crisis
- structural crises and economic change impacting on the provision of SGI
- the negative impact on SGI of environmental factors acting in an exogenous manner in different grades in various parts of the world

ongoing economic and financial crisis as well as the deregulatory and liberalisation processes (promoted by the EU)
- reduction of investments in SGI in Europe due to the economic crisis
- poorly professionalized bureaucracy and frequent changes in the law negatively impacting the provision of SGI
- regions subject to a variety of drivers, the combination of which resulting in unique situations and perspectives for SGI provision

**Opportunities**
- increase in the population density
- rise of life expectancy from late 1960s impacting mainly on elderly care services
- reduction of population at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- private sector will substitute the State on the production and provision of services of general interests, with public investment or a mix of

- market forces fostering the territorial setting of SGI provision by creating vital and dynamic circumstances for production and delivery especially in urban areas determining better affordability, quality and variety of SGI
- the competitive situation brings about higher efficiency and better products in terms of SGI provision
- trends of concentration and

- EC’s vision in favour of fair accessibility and well distributed SGI
- high availability of SGI for all users when SGI provision is firmly linked to territorial policy and planning
- use of European Regional Development Fund and Cohesion Fund for vital investments in regions suffering from a weak economic structure as well as a population decline for the development of various SGI
### Exploring the Territorial Capital, Global Competition and Territorial Cohesion Policy: a SWOT Analysis of Services of General Interest

| Public and private funds, at the rate of private catchment of individual social contributions | Wide variations in SGI provision leading to sub-prioritization of profit making and relative market shares  
- Investment in R&D activities related to SGI as a result of global competition  
- Increase in the percentage of the energy coming from renewable energy production  
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emission, and maintenance of regulations on greenhouse gas emission  
- Low qualified labour immigrants impact the social housing services | Expected improvement of the financial situation, especially by raising the GDP per capita  
- Relatively modest regional growth in many regions case  
- Decrease in public expense relative to GDP as a result of the financial crisis determining the reduction of social services and transfer to individual responsibility of some of social risks assumed until now by the community  
- Reduced accessibility of SGI and relatively higher provision costs |

| **Threats** | Declining, shrinking population base for most SGI meaning higher costs per remaining inhabitant and a weaker tax base  
- Income, substitution effects, feminine activity rate or post-industrial family composition leading to decline in fertility rates  
- Aging population, | Dependence on global economic and financial evolution generating constrains to maintain social welfare and SGI supply levels  
- Economic difficulties to achieve Europe 2020 targets determining a relatively modest growth and economic transition into a knowledge economy |
demographic decline, and imbalance of gender structure generating a severe constrain to financing SGI supply
- decrease in active population
- movement of the highly qualified labour to metropolitan areas in the EU, putting pressure on SGI
- uncertainty on maintaining the provision of services in rural areas that face a declining number of inhabitants as well as in areas characterized by high unemployment rates and low level of income
- increase in number of peripheral areas suffering from depopulation impacting on SGI provision
- reduction of school early levers and improvement of third level education

- climate change and natural hazards impacting on the development and functioning of SGI in various degrees over a long-term period
- changing relative factor prices for raw material with direct impact on SGI provision
- changes in demand and supply of energy
- competition in terms of migration destination at global scale impacting on different SGI provision
- the possibility of mass immigration from Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans, North Africa and Western Asia especially to Western Europe
- political instability outside the EU
- war and conflicts outside the EU

Source: authors’ synthesis based on the results and findings provided by ESPON (2012), *Indicators and perspectives for services of general interest in territorial cohesion and development*. Draft Final Report. ESPON: Luxembourg
Concluding remarks

Territorial cohesion translates the sustainable and balanced development goals into territorial terms, placing an explicit emphasis on the fair access of citizens and economic agents to SGI. Usually the provision of SGI at certain standards in terms of availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, variety and the territorial dimension is discussed in relation to the supply of minimum service levels by each EU member state, the threshold depending on macroeconomic performance, institutions, ideologies.

The analysis undertaken in this article has revealed the close relationship between territorial capital and the SGI drivers, namely economy, demography, society, policy and environment and the important impact of the global changes in these fields. The patterns of SGI provision may considerably vary depending on territory characteristics associated with densely/urban areas or sparsely/periiphery ones, inducing variations in the role of SGI as support for a competitive, social and green Europe.

In terms of territorial organization, a tendency towards the convergence to a high level of sub-national, shared responsibility for SGI provision (especially for social ones) can be noticed, serving as mainstream model for further political development and integration (Humer et al., 2013).

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