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*The trans-European research project, COHSMO, which is funded by The EU Commission's Horizon 2020-programme, was launched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May this year. But what is the purpose of COHSMO?*



## WHAT IS THE COHSMO PROJECT?

A new trans-European research project took off 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2017: COHSMO – the acronym for Inequality, Urbanization and Territorial **C**ohesion: Developing the European **S**ocial **M**odel of economic growth and democratic capacity – received financial support from the EU Commission for a four year period 2017-2021. The Horizon 2020-programme has funded the project and it includes seven partners from across Europe. The

aim is to investigate the territorial dimension in relation to socio-economic forms of inequality.

### OBJECTIVES

Inequality is rising across Europe; manifesting itself as socio-economic differences between neighborhoods, between cities and between regions. This makes it pertinent to investigate the

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multiple ways in which location matters – not only in terms of life chances for the individual, but also in terms of the systematic way that topological differences map onto social differences characterizing variations in collective conditions of social and material well-being, as well as health inequalities. The relation between economic inequality and territorial and social differences is complex. Therefore, to gain an understanding of this complex relation, we need not only better tools and concepts with which to grasp the differences, but also a better understanding of how and why different governmental programmes and governmental relations might intervene in and mediate between such differences, and especially the role of local belonging and community relations in this regard.

COHSMO aims at investigating the relation between socio-economic structures of inequality, urbanization and territorial cohesion, and how territorial cohesion at different European scales affect economic growth, spatial justice and democratic capacities. The way that public, private and civil society stakeholders relate to and cope with spatial injustice varies across localities in Europe.

COHSMO will develop policy recommendations in relation to sustainable economic growth, spatial justice and democratic capacity. Because they stem from location-sensitive and cross-contextual research, such recommendations will make it possible to develop the European Social Model.

## WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT SPATIAL INEQUALITIES?

*Interview with Project Coordinator, Hans Thor Andersen, Aalborg University*



### **Should we care about territorial cohesion?**

Yes, I believe we are witnessing rising inequality at many scales. These inequalities are threatening the social order, to put it in abstract terms. It simply means that living conditions and life and life chances not only depend on social background but also on where you grow up. Obviously, differences in welfare arrangements, living standards, and access to public services vary from place to place. Access to decent employment, i.e. offer you a fair income and working conditions, is not guaranteed to all Europeans. Access to education, welfare services or accept-

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able housing is important for everybody, but not all can enjoy these goods. There are of course differences between European countries, which give people different possibilities. Similarly, regions within a country differ, often in terms of employment opportunities, income, general living conditions and just as within cities, we find surprisingly unequal chances in neighborhoods located next to each other.

It is, first of all, a democratic issue – are we really accepting exclusion of smaller or larger parts of the population from good living conditions? In relation to social stability, the unbalanced cohesion across space makes a larger number of people migrate, voluntary or not, to regions or cities with better opportunities. This produces regions and districts with reduced options for its inhabitants and puts question marks on the political system. Moreover, the unused potentials could increase wealth and living conditions for us all, but remain unexploited due to social-

spatial differences. One example is the share of a cohort attending secondary schools in Denmark; in upper class areas, this share is close to 100 %, while districts marked by unskilled labour and immigrants have a share about a third. While the former most likely will continue in the educational system, the latter often drop out of school without any formal degree. This has serious effects in their life chances.

### **How was the project initiated?**

The very early start was some discussions in a group of people who established a master's programme in urban sociology/social geography. We came from the Department of Sociology and Danish Building Institute, both at Aalborg University. We had at least one common interest – the relationship between spatial structures and social relations. We talked about doing some research together and when the Horizon2020 call appeared... we just had to write a proposal and find some



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partners.

### **How was the consortium made?**

The consortium was established by contacting relevant colleagues across Europe; firstly, we considered how many we should be in relation to the theme and budget, i.e. not too few, neither too many. The larger the consortium, the bigger the efforts to conduct the work. The size of seven partners is maybe not ideal, but it is handy.

Secondly, we considered it relevant to have partners from all “corners” of Europe, corners that at the same time represent different forms of welfare states, history, institutional setup and the like. It is not possible to include all European member states, but this is also not the intention. It is my experience that forming a good consortium is a most decisive task when you consider the chances of success for the project. You are mutually depending on each other. This project runs for four years, and if we are going to be able to deliver as promised, we all need to be efficient and supportive. The specific choice of partners was made in a simple way – people I know as reliable and hard-working from previous activities, such as other major projects, cost actions, conferences and so on plus a few new ones, were selected.

### **You will establish both a European as well as national advisory boards. How can they contribute to the project?**

We will organize the national advisory boards during the next few months; they have a double function: on the one

hand, they should discuss our intentions and practical implementation as well as methods and outcome together with us. On the other hand, they will act as efficient channels for dissemination of our work, as they represent relevant authorities, organizations etc. The European advisory board has a bit of a different function; they should, first of all, help us bring our findings to a relevant European Audience. They will take part in some of our consortium meetings and of course the closing conference.

### **What will be your role in the project?**

Unfortunately, I will only be passive as researcher this time. My position as head of department does not leave enough time to take part; only management such as coordination, making sure deliverables keep the time table, organizing consortium meetings, reporting etc. And keep an eye to the general progress we make together with our Project Manager.

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