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Understanding regional development strategies of the European Union and China: Lessons learned for Vietnam

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Abstract: This study aims to understand the European countries and China's regional development strategies in enhancing cohesion and reducing regional disparity to serve as lessons learned for Vietnam. The study provides an overview of the approaches, priorities, and challenges faced in regional development policies pursued by the European countries and China, showcasing their respective efforts in addressing regional disparities and fostering sustainable development within their territories. From the EU's macro-regional strategies (MRS), Vietnam can adopt principles of enhanced connectivity, sustainable development, inclusive growth, and institutional coordination to create a framework promoting balanced and sustainable growth. Additionally, the EU's smart specialization strategy offers a model for fostering innovation-driven growth and regional competitiveness by encouraging regions to identify and capitalize on their unique strengths. From China's regional development initiatives, Vietnam can learn the importance of targeted interventions to address regional disparities and promote balanced development. Also, China's success in developing interconnected urban clusters or metropolitan areas-driven regional development strategies offers valuable insights for Vietnam's urban agglomeration efforts. By adopting these strategies, Vietnam can enhance its sustainable urban development, improve livability, and maximize the economic potential of its cities and towns.

Keywords: balanced development; macro-regional strategy; regional cohesion; regional development; smart specification strategy

1. Introduction

'Region' is a concept commonly used in development policy studies. The understanding and application of the term 'region' can differ based on the disciplinary perspectives, objectives, and methodologies employed. Despite differences in approach, the region is still defined with certain boundaries, a space where each activity has an interactive impact on each other.

Over the past decades, the field of research on regional development policies and regional cohesion and convergence has received much attention from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers at different levels of governance [1–4]. The pursuit of regional cohesion remains both an aspiration and a necessity. In this quest for cohesion, drawing lessons from experiences across continents becomes instrumental in comprehending the intricacies of regional development dynamics. The European Union (EU) and China have offered contrasting yet insightful paradigms in fostering regional cohesion, serving as compelling case studies for understanding mechanisms that could potentially resonate within a global context.

The EU, with its multi-country collaborative framework, exemplifies an intricate linkage of regional integration, where diverse nations with distinct socio-economic backgrounds converge under a common umbrella. The EU's experience in promoting

cohesion policies, fostering cross-border cooperation, and harmonizing development strategies across regions holds valuable lessons that might provide insights into addressing disparities and enhancing connectivity within the varied provinces and geographical regions [5,6].

Conversely, China's remarkable transformation and its approach to regional development, characterized by targeted policies, strategic investments, and infrastructural advancements, offer a contrasting perspective [2,7,8]. China's emphasis on regional connectivity through both global and local initiatives and its experiences in managing large-scale regional disparities could offer pertinent insights into potential pathways for infrastructure development, economic collaboration, and inclusive growth strategies within geographical regions.

This research endeavors to bridge geographical and conceptual gaps by scrutinizing the European and Chinese models of regional cohesion and discerning the underlying principles, policy frameworks, and implementation strategies that have contributed to fostering unity, resilience, and sustainable development within their respective contexts. By critically examining the successes, challenges, and contextual nuances of these models, this study aims to distill lessons that can inform and enrich strategies for enhancing regional cohesion within the socio-economic and environmental fabric of Vietnam.

Moreover, this comparative study seeks not only to identify transferable practices but also to acknowledge the necessity of tailoring strategies to suit Vietnam's unique challenges and opportunities. By assimilating insights from diverse regional development experiences, this research aspires to contribute to the discourse on nuanced approaches, policy frameworks, and collaborative initiatives that can fortify cohesion and catalyze sustainable progress in Vietnam.

2. Regional development strategies of the European Union

2.1. Macro-regional strategies (“MRS”)

Macro-regional strategies are comprehensive frameworks established by groups of countries or regions that share common geographical features, challenges, and goals. These strategies aim to promote cooperation and integrated development across borders towards sustainable growth. In essence, MRS aims to address challenges that demand collaboration among multiple countries by adopting a comprehensive approach involving various sectors and governance levels [9].

Since 2009, the EU has pioneered macro-regional strategies such as the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR, 2009), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR, 2010), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR, 2014), and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP, 2015) [10–13]. These four EU Strategies are conducted in 19 EU member states and 9 non-EU countries. Each strategy focuses on enhancing cooperation among countries in specific regions to address challenges like environmental sustainability, economic development, transport, and cultural exchange.

All macro strategies of the EU were developed by identifying key regional challenges and then setting out goals and subgoals to address them. These strategies were accompanied by a rolling action plan that is regularly updated according to new

needs and changing contexts [14]. For example, the EUSBSR is divided into three goals, representing the three main challenges of the region: ‘saving the sea’, ‘connecting the region’ and ‘increasing prosperity’; or the EUSAIR has four pillars, including ‘blue growth in the fisheries sector’, ‘regional connectivity in energy and transport’, ‘environmental quality’ and ‘tourism development’. The EUSDR Strategy has also identified 11 priority goals for regional development, focusing on the following aspects: transport connectivity (waterways), energy connection, environmental quality, socio-economic development, and security [15,16].

About the core principles of MRS, the study has identified four pillars for building policy interventions and instruments [6,17–20]. First, the ‘Enhanced Connectivity’ pillar highlights that infrastructure development, transport networks, and digital connectivity are pivotal components, fostering economic growth and trade among participating regions. Second, the ‘Sustainable Development’ pillar emphasises environmental protection, natural resource management, and resilience against climate change to ensure sustainable development practices. Third, the ‘Inclusive Growth’ pillar aimed at reducing disparities, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring equal opportunities for all regions involved. Fourth, the ‘Institutional Coordination’ pillar strengthens governance structures and promotes collaboration among governments, stakeholders, and institutions to facilitate effective implementation of strategies. By applying these above principles, countries/regions could seize the opportunities for synergy. It means that leveraging shared resources, expertise, and best practices among participating regions can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes.

However, there are still challenges that countries/regions need to pay attention to when developing and implementing MRS. They include (1) Coordination and implementation challenges—Managing diverse interests, aligning policies, and ensuring effective coordination among participating countries or regions can be complex; (2) financial and resource constraints—Limited funding and resources can hinder the successful implementation of macro-regional strategies; (3) monitoring and evaluation system—Continuous monitoring, assessment of progress, and evaluation of outcomes are required to gauge the effectiveness of macro-regional strategies; and (4) requirements on adaptability and flexibility—Strategies should remain adaptive to changing circumstances, evolving challenges, and emerging opportunities [20,21].

2.2. Smart specialization strategy (“S3”)

The EU’s Smart Specialization Strategy represents a transformative and innovative approach to regional economic development and innovation policy. Introduced as part of the EU’s cohesion policy framework, S3 is designed to promote place-based, innovation-driven growth by identifying and building on the unique assets and strengths of each region [22]. The strategy emphasizes a bottom-up approach, requiring regions to engage in an entrepreneurial discovery process involving local stakeholders—such as businesses, research institutions, and civil society—to identify priority areas for investment (**Figure 1**). This ensures that the strategies are not only tailored to the specific needs and opportunities of the regions but also enjoy broad-based support and commitment from local actors.

The S3 strategies are an essential part of the EU Cohesion Policy starting after the period 2014–2021 [23]. Adapting to the characteristics of each territory, the S3 strategy is based on the following factors: (i) public-private governance and promoting business involvement; (ii) specific legal tools to support the implementation of activities; (iii) prioritizing innovation fields based on regional strengths; and (iv) impact monitoring systems.

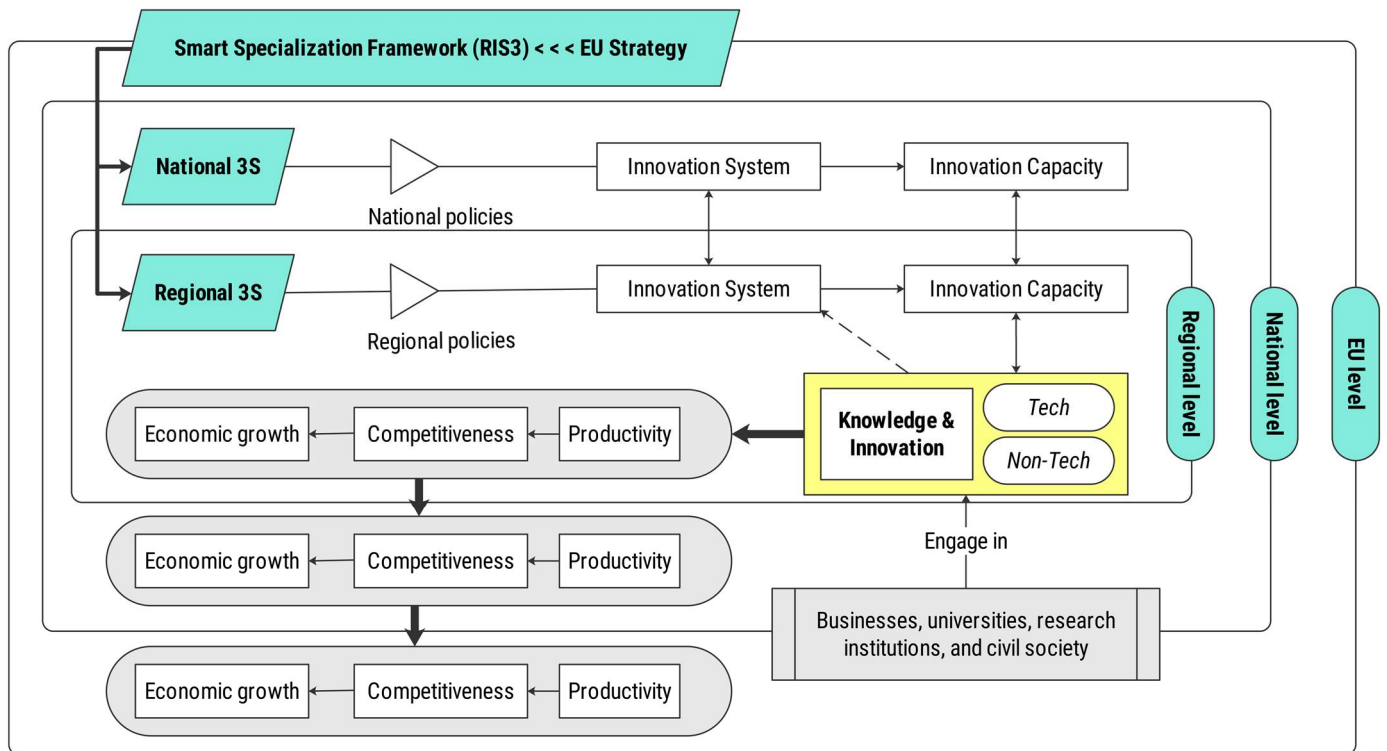


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of smart specialization strategy.

(Source: Synthesized by author, adapted from Kopczynska and Ferreira [24]).

One of the core principles of S3 is the focus on specialization. Unlike traditional, broad-based regional development policies, S3 encourages regions to concentrate their resources on a limited number of priority areas where they have the potential to excel and achieve a competitive advantage. This approach helps to avoid the dispersion of resources and enables more effective and impactful investments. For instance, regions might choose to specialize in sectors like renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, or digital technologies, depending on their existing capabilities and future potential. By fostering specialization, regions can develop niche markets, attract targeted investments, and create high-quality jobs, thereby enhancing their overall economic performance and resilience.

European countries have issued national and regional S3 plans, such as Ireland [25], Hungary [26], Serbia [27], and the Wallonia region in Belgium [28], and the Navarre region in Spain [22]. Since 2011, the European Commission has provided guidance on how to develop and implement S3 plans to regional and national authorities via a mechanism called the 'Smart Specialization Platform'. The platform facilitates learning, data collection, analysis, and networking opportunities for around 170 EU regions and 18 national governments.

The implementation of S3 has led to notable successes across the EU. Regions

that have embraced the strategy have reported significant improvements in their innovation ecosystems and economic outcomes. For example, the Basque Country in Spain has leveraged S3 to become a leader in advanced manufacturing and industrial automation, creating a robust ecosystem of innovation and high-tech industries [29]. Similarly, regions in Italy, such as Emilia-Romagna, have focused on specialized sectors like automotive and agri-food technologies, driving growth and innovation through targeted investments and collaborative research initiatives [30]. These successes highlight the importance of aligning regional development policies with local strengths and opportunities, as well as the benefits of fostering public-private partnerships and cross-sector collaboration.

Furthermore, S3 has facilitated enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing across regions, both within and beyond national borders. The EU's emphasis on inter-regional cooperation has encouraged regions to learn from each other and to engage in joint initiatives, leveraging complementary strengths and creating synergies. For example, regions specializing in renewable energy can collaborate on research and development projects, share best practices, and jointly attract investments, thus amplifying their impact. This collaborative approach not only strengthens individual regions but also contributes to the overall cohesion and competitiveness of the EU. By promoting innovation-driven growth and reducing regional disparities, S3 supports the EU's broader goals of smart, sustainable, and inclusive development.

Additionally, some regions are also adding a fourth 'S'—Sustainability to their strategies. Smart specialization strategies for sustainability (S4) aim to improve sustainability through innovation, sustainable resilience, and adaptation. S4 is therefore a tool to adapt to the post-pandemic economy, enabling regions to adapt and also take advantage of any new opportunities that open up in this new scenario.

3. Regional development strategies of China

3.1. Policy initiatives for balanced regional development

China has implemented various inbound regional development policies to foster economic growth and reduce disparities among its regions. Some of the key initiatives include: Open Up the West, Revitalize the Old Northeast Industrial Bases, and the Rise of Central China. The main features of these policies are presented in **Table 1**.

These regional development initiatives of China have brought significant changes and improvements for the lagged regions. The study has reviewed and highlighted some major policy instruments and actions taken under these initiatives [2,7,8,31] including: infrastructure investment (i.e., national investment in building transportation networks, hydropower, and telecommunications); industrial development and restructuring (i.e., modernizing traditional heavy industries and promoting technological advancement, high-tech industries); investment promotion (i.e., attracting domestic and foreign investments into lagged regions; proving preferential policies, tax incentives, and fiscal transfer); innovation, research, and entrepreneurship (i.e., encouraging public-private partnerships (PPPs), collaborations between the government, private sector, and academia to foster innovation, research, and entrepreneurship); talent retention (i.e., assigning talent to work in local government temporarily as the means to improve their administrative ability and

avoiding letting talent move to richer provinces/regions); poverty alleviation and social development (i.e., improving living standards, access to education, healthcare, and welfare, and developing a skilled workforce ready for modern industries); environmental protection and sustainability (i.e., promoting afforestation, sustainable practices in industries, reducing pollution, and addressing environmental degradation caused by previous industrial activities).

Table 1. Comparison of regional development initiatives of China.

	Open Up the West	Revitalize the Old Northeast Industrial Bases	The Rise of Central China
Year of adoption	1999	2003	2004
Targeted provinces	Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Chongqing.	Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, and five eastern prefectures of Inner Mongolia.	Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Hunan, and Jiangxi.
Key issues	Due to the Chinese economic reform, the economies of China's western half lagged behind economically compared to the coastal region. These regional imbalances can cause threats involving social discontent and political problems.	Northeast China was heavily affected by the restructuring of the Chinese economy and the closing and consolidation of many heavy industry state-owned enterprises. This region has the lowest ranking for GRDP growth rate in China.	Central China's development has not kept pace with the coastal region, and is not commensurate with the region's geographical advantages, population, and economic strengths.
Supporting strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure development: building transportation networks, hydropower and telecommunications. • Economic diversification: supporting agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and technology sectors. • Investment and incentives: offering incentives and policy support to attract domestic and foreign investments. • Poverty alleviation: improving living standards, access to education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure. • Environmental protection: afforestation. • - Talent retention: avoid letting talent move to richer provinces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial restructuring: modernizing traditional heavy industries, and promoting high-tech industries. • Encouraging investment and innovation: attracting investment in key sectors, and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. • Infrastructure development: focus on investing in transportation networks. • Environmentally sustainable development: promoting sustainable practices in industries, reducing pollution and addressing environmental degradation caused by previous industrial activities. • Social welfare and human capital development: improving social welfare, education, and developing a skilled workforce ready for modern industries. • - Public-Private Partnerships: encouraging collaborations between the government, private sector, and academia to foster innovation, research, and development in the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure development: building and upgrading transportation networks, infrastructure investments aimed to attract businesses, facilitate trade, and stimulate economic activities. • Industrial transformation and upgrading: encouraging innovation, technological advancement, and developing high-tech industries, advanced manufacturing, and service sectors to diversify the regional economy. • Investment promotion: attracting domestic and foreign investments into the central regions, providing preferential policies, tax incentives, and subsidies to stimulate economic growth, and create employment opportunities. • Poverty alleviation and social development: improving social welfare, education, healthcare, and infrastructure in less-developed areas within the central provinces, ensuring inclusive growth. • - Environmental protection: emphasizing on sustainable development practices and environmental protection measures to prevent pollution and ecological degradation while fostering economic growth.

Source: Synthesized by author.

3.2. Metropolitan areas-driven regional development strategy

Another noteworthy strategy of China is metropolitan urban-driven regional development, closely linked to the concept of urban agglomeration. Urban agglomeration refers to the clustering of cities around a central urban core, creating a contiguous urban area characterized by high population density, economic activity, and interconnected infrastructure. China's urban agglomeration has undergone rapid transformation over the past few decades, driven by unprecedented economic growth and extensive urbanization policies. In the 14th Five-Year Plan, China recognized three urban clusters, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei (Jing-Jin-Ji), Yangtze River Delta (YRD), and Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), as focal points to enhance the national development strategies.

These major urban agglomerations have emerged as powerful economic engines. These regions have benefited from massive infrastructure investments, including high-speed rail networks, highways, and ports, facilitating efficient movement of goods and people. The GBA region, for example, transformed from a predominantly agricultural region into a global manufacturing hub, integrating cities like Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong into a cohesive economic unit. This transformation has led to significant GDP contributions, high employment rates, and enhanced global trade connections.

The rapid urbanization in these agglomerations has also led to various socio-economic benefits. There has been a marked improvement in living standards, healthcare, and educational facilities, contributing to an overall increase in the quality of life for residents. Urban agglomerations have become centers of innovation, attracting both domestic and international talent and fostering a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Yangtze River Delta, with cities like Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Suzhou, has become a leading center for finance, technology, and advanced manufacturing. These agglomerations have also seen the emergence of specialized industrial clusters, such as the tech industries in Shenzhen and the automotive sector in Changchun, further driving regional economic specialization and productivity.

However, the rapid growth of China's urban agglomerations also presents significant challenges. The influx of people into these urban areas has led to overburdened infrastructure, housing shortages, and environmental degradation. Air and water pollution remain critical issues, exacerbated by industrial activities and high population densities. Additionally, the disparities between urban and rural areas have widened, with rural regions often lagging in terms of economic opportunities and public services. Addressing these challenges requires sustainable urban planning, investment in modern technologies, and policies aimed at reducing regional inequalities. The Chinese government has recognized these issues and is increasingly focusing on creating more balanced and sustainable urban development models to ensure long-term economic stability and environmental health.

4. Discussion

4.1. The EU and China: Same but different

When comparing the regional development strategies of China and the EU,

several key differences and similarities emerge. China's approach, exemplified by policy initiatives for balanced regional development and urban agglomeration, is characterized by targeted interventions to address specific regional challenges and opportunities. These strategies often involve large-scale infrastructure investments, industrial restructuring, and urbanization initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and reducing regional disparities. In contrast, the EU's regional development approach combines MRS with thematic strategies such as the 3S. These strategies emphasize cross-border cooperation, innovation, and sustainable development to enhance regional competitiveness and cohesion.

Governance and institutional frameworks also differ between China and the EU. Regional development in China is largely driven by top-down policies and directives from the central government, with regional governments implementing national strategies and initiatives. Decision-making authority is centralized, and there is limited autonomy for local and regional governments. On the other hand, the EU's regional development policies involve a complex governance structure, with decision-making shared between the EU institutions and member states. Regional authorities play a significant role in the implementation of EU-funded projects and programs, and there is a strong emphasis on partnership and subsidiarity.

Furthermore, the focus on innovation and specialization varies between China and the EU. While China's strategies include elements of innovation and specialization, such as the promotion of high-tech industries in urban agglomerations, the focus is often on industrial upgrading and infrastructure development to drive economic growth. In contrast, the EU's 3S places a greater emphasis on innovation-driven growth and regional specialization. This strategy encourages regions to identify and build on their unique strengths and competitive advantages, fostering collaboration between businesses, research institutions, and local governments.

Both China and the EU aim to achieve inclusive growth through their regional development strategies, but their approaches differ. China seeks to reduce disparities between urban and rural areas and promote balanced development across regions. However, there are challenges in ensuring equitable access to opportunities and resources. In the EU, place-based policies such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Policy are designed to reduce disparities between regions and promote social and economic cohesion. These policies target investments in lagging regions and support initiatives to boost employment, education, and social inclusion.

Additionally, environmental sustainability and urbanization present significant challenges for both China and the EU. While China faces issues such as pollution, resource depletion, and ecological degradation in rapidly urbanizing regions, the EU emphasizes environmental sustainability and green growth through policies aimed at reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, and protecting natural resources. Sustainable urbanization is also a key priority, with initiatives to improve air quality, reduce congestion, and enhance green spaces in cities.

4.2. Some lessons learned for Vietnam

Regional development in Vietnam is a multifaceted endeavor, encompassing

strategies and policies designed to address historical disparities, stimulate economic vibrancy, and improve the overall well-being of its citizens. Against the backdrop of a dynamic and evolving socio-economic landscape, Vietnam has been crafting and implementing a spectrum of regional development policies aimed at unleashing the full potential of its diverse provinces. These policies are not mere blueprints for economic progress; they represent a concerted effort to create inclusive and sustainable growth. Specifically, Vietnam marked her efforts with the Northern Mountainous and Central Highlands Development Programs, Socio-Economic Development Plans, National Targeted Program for Sustainable Poverty Reduction [32], Strategic Infrastructure Projects (such as transportation networks, energy facilities, and digital infrastructure), and Public-Private Partnerships [33].

As of 2022, Vietnam has identified a new direction for regional development towards “Better exploit and maximize the advantages of each region in terms of infrastructure, natural conditions, economic-political position, labor force, and enhance internal and regional linkages to participate in global value chains, creating new development spaces.” as stated in the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam. In line with that, Vietnam has launched six resolutions for the regional development strategy in her six strategic regions, respectively [34]. However, the implementation of these strategies still has many limitations. In particular, guidelines and policies on regional integration are slow to be implemented; the role of subjects participating in regional integration, especially the central government, is still vague; and the mechanism for implementing regional integration policies has not been effective or most effective. These limitations were identified in Resolution No. 57/NQ-CP of Vietnam’s Government [35].

Within the framework of this research, I identify some policy implications for Vietnam in building its regional development policies leveraged by the EU and China’s policies as follows:

For the EU’s MRS, Vietnam stands to gain valuable insights from these strategies by incorporating four key principles into its own regional development initiatives. Firstly, the principle of ‘Enhanced Connectivity’ underscores the importance of robust infrastructure, digital networks, and efficient transport systems to stimulate economic growth. Secondly, the emphasis on ‘Sustainable Development’ guides Vietnam to prioritize environmental protection, natural resource management, and climate resilience in its regional planning. The ‘Inclusive Growth’ principle highlights the necessity of reducing disparities, fostering social inclusion, and providing equal opportunities for all regions. Lastly, the ‘Institutional Coordination’ principle emphasizes the need for effective governance structures and collaborative mechanisms, ensuring seamless coordination among various stakeholders. By aligning its regional development strategies with these principles, Vietnam can create a framework that promotes balanced and sustainable growth across its diverse regions.

Furthermore, Vietnam can learn from the EU’s smart specialization strategy in promoting innovation-driven growth and regional competitiveness. By encouraging regions to identify and capitalize on their unique strengths and competitive advantages, the EU has fostered innovation ecosystems that spur economic development and job creation. Vietnam could leverage this approach to prioritize investment in key sectors and industries where it has a comparative advantage, such

as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. By focusing on innovation and specialization, Vietnam can enhance its global competitiveness, attract foreign investment, and accelerate its transition to a knowledge-based economy. Moreover, aligning regional development policies with smart specialization principles can help ensure that growth is inclusive and sustainable, benefiting all segments of society and contributing to long-term prosperity.

For China's initiatives, with the institutional similarities between China and Vietnam, Vietnam can extract valuable lessons from China's regional development initiatives by emphasizing key pillars crucial for successful implementation.

First, China's regional development strategies, such as 'Open Up the West,' 'Revitalize the Old Northeast Industrial Bases,' and 'The Rise of Central China,' offer lessons on the importance of targeted interventions to address regional disparities and promote balanced development. By focusing on specific regions and implementing tailored policies and investments, China has been able to stimulate economic growth, improve infrastructure, and alleviate poverty in underdeveloped areas. Vietnam could adopt a similar approach by identifying its own regions with untapped potential and implementing strategies to unlock their economic and social development.

Second, China's experience with urban agglomeration provides valuable lessons for Vietnam as it grapples with rapid urbanization and urban sprawl. China's efforts to develop interconnected urban clusters, such as the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Yangtze River Delta, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, demonstrate the importance of coordinated urban planning, infrastructure development, and governance mechanisms. By promoting collaboration and integration between cities, China has been able to leverage economies of scale, enhance productivity, and address common challenges such as congestion, pollution, and resource scarcity. Vietnam could benefit from adopting a similar approach to foster sustainable urban development, improve livability, and maximize the economic potential of its urban areas, e.g., Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi.

5. Conclusion

By understanding regional development strategies of the EU and China, this research reveals several key lessons and insights that offer valuable implications for fostering effective and sustainable regional development strategies. Here are some key takeaways:

Diverse Approaches to Regional Development: The EU and China employ diverse approaches tailored to their unique contexts and challenges. The EU emphasizes cohesion, solidarity, and multilevel governance, leveraging structural funds and smart specialization strategies. In contrast, China implements targeted initiatives addressing their specific regional challenges.

Balancing National Goals with Regional Needs: Both entities grapple with balancing national priorities with regional disparities. China's centralized governance aims to bridge the rural-urban divide and develop underperforming regions. Conversely, the EU's decentralized approach accommodates the diversity of regional needs while aligning them with broader EU objectives.

Tailoring Policies to Local Needs: Place-based policies recognize the diversity of regions and emphasize tailoring policies to address specific local needs. Smart specialization emphasizes identifying and developing a region's unique strengths and competitive advantages. Vietnam can learn to strategically leverage its own unique resources, skills, and capabilities at the regional level.

Fostering Innovation, Infrastructure, and Economic Transformation: Both the EU and China prioritize innovation, infrastructure development, and economic transformation as drivers of regional growth. They invest in technology, education, and industry upgrades to enhance regional competitiveness and stimulate economic progress.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Concerns: There is a growing emphasis on sustainability and environmental considerations in regional development policies. The EU emphasizes sustainability through its smart specialization strategies, while China increasingly integrates environmental conservation and green development into its regional initiatives to address environmental challenges.

International Cooperation and Connectivity: Both entities recognize the importance of international cooperation and connectivity for regional development. The EU focuses on territorial cooperation among member states, while China promotes connectivity and economic integration across territories and countries (e.g., via the Belt and Road Initiative).

Challenges of Inequality and Balanced Growth: Addressing regional disparities and achieving balanced growth remain persistent challenges for both the EU and China. Income inequality, environmental degradation, and disparities between urban and rural areas are among the challenges that require sustained policy attention.

Learning and Adaptation: Continuous learning, evaluation, and adaptation of regional development policies are crucial. Both the EU and China refine their policies based on experiences, changing circumstances, and emerging challenges to enhance policy effectiveness and address evolving regional needs.

In conclusion, lessons learned from the regional development policies of the EU and China underscore the importance of tailoring strategies to regional contexts, balancing national and regional priorities, promoting innovation and sustainability, addressing disparities, fostering international cooperation, and adapting policies to changing circumstances. These lessons can inform policymakers in their efforts to design and implement effective and inclusive regional development strategies.

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