

A renewed territorial agenda for the EU

SUMMARY

The main objective of the territorial agenda is to strengthen territorial cohesion, an EU principle that seeks to ensure the balanced development of the EU and reduce its regional disparities. Agreed in May 2011 and the culmination of a process begun many years earlier with the European Spatial Development Perspective, the Territorial Agenda 2020 has recently been renewed with a view to establishing a continued role for this initiative within the EU's new cohesion policy framework beyond 2020.

Aimed at ensuring the Europe 2020 strategy was implemented in line with the principle of territorial cohesion, the Territorial Agenda 2020 strived to promote the integration of the territorial dimension across many different policies. To deliver on this ambition, it established an action-oriented political framework based around six territorial priorities and a series of implementation mechanisms to make EU territorial cohesion a reality. However, with the territorial agenda a low political priority in past years, implementation remained weak, while the process itself was beset by challenges, such as fragile intergovernmental cooperation and a low level of awareness. This situation was compounded by the complex and abstract nature of the territorial agenda, making it difficult to communicate its aims and objectives.

Set up in 2018 during the Austrian Presidency, an intergovernmental taskforce led the work on the renewal of the territorial agenda, the aim being to conclude the process under the German Presidency, leading to the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in December 2020. Spanned by two overarching priorities, a 'just Europe' and a 'green Europe', the renewed territorial agenda establishes a clear link with the European Commission's current priorities and its strategy for sustainable growth, the European Green Deal. While this structure has the potential to help embed the territorial agenda more firmly within the EU's policy-making system, increasing its relevance and improving its visibility, the advent of this important addition to the EU's territorial toolbox risks being overshadowed by the rollout of the new MFF in the months ahead.

This is an updated edition of a [Briefing](#) from March 2020.



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Introduction

A strategic policy document for Europe and its regions, the territorial agenda's primary objective is to enhance territorial cohesion within the European Union. While there is no single definition of territorial cohesion, it is generally understood to refer to a process that seeks to ensure the balanced development of the European Union, reducing the disparities that exist between developed regions and those that are lagging behind, helping each local area to make the most of its unique potential.

To deliver on this aim, the territorial agenda outlines a broad set of guidelines for spatial planning and enhancing the territorial dimension of all related policies at the various levels of governance, introducing an action-oriented framework to help policy-makers strengthen territorial cohesion across Europe. Agreed in May 2011 by the ministers for spatial planning and territorial cohesion, the territorial agenda has recently been revised so as to ensure a continued role for this initiative within the EU's new cohesion policy framework, leading to the Territorial Agenda 2030.

While the starting point for the discussions on the renewal of the territorial agenda was the Territorial Agenda 2020 (TA2020) signed in May 2011, this document itself is just one of a long line of strategic documents that have been developed as part of a predominantly intergovernmental process spanning the last 20 years.

Background

Adopted in 1999, the [European Spatial Development Perspective](#) (ESDP) may be considered to be the first strategic EU paper focusing on spatial development, its aim being to establish a policy framework for sectoral policies with a spatial impact in order to ensure the balanced and sustainable development of Europe. With no reference to spatial development in the Treaties, the document was agreed by the ministers for spatial development and development, initiating a form of cooperation that has continued to the present day, helping to lay the foundations for the discussions that would eventually lead to the development of the Territorial Agenda 2020.

The ESDP was followed in 2007 by the [Territorial Agenda of the European Union](#). Drafted by the same group of experts as its predecessor, it established an action-oriented political framework for future cooperation to help contribute to sustainable economic growth and job creation as well as social and ecological development in all EU regions. Defining territorial cohesion as a permanent and cooperative process involving the various actors and stakeholders of territorial development, the document outlined six main priorities including the development of new forms of partnership and territorial governance between rural and urban areas or strengthening ecological structures and cultural resources. Strengthening polycentric development was a particular priority, with the territorial agenda seeking to promote the polycentric territorial development of the EU in order to make better use of available resources in EU regions. This concept, which draws on the EU's network of towns and cities and their role as regional centres promoting local development has continued to feature prominently in the subsequent discussions on the territorial agenda.

Following the introduction of territorial cohesion as a specific EU policy objective under the Lisbon Treaty in December 2007 alongside economic and social cohesion, establishing it as a shared competence between the EU and the Member States, the EU published a [green paper on territorial cohesion](#) in October 2008. Seeking to turn territorial diversity into a strength by exploring how the assets of individual regions and places may be harnessed to contribute to the sustainable development of the EU, the document also promoted a more active role for the European Commission in the process and examined the impact of the new status of territorial cohesion for EU policy-making. In this light, the paper outlined a number of issues to be consulted further with the wider policy-making community in view of the possible launch of a white paper on territorial cohesion, yet no further action was taken in this respect. This arguably only served to further strengthen the importance of intergovernmental cooperation for the territorial agenda process, paving the way for the publication of the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 in 2011.

Territorial Agenda 2020

Originally conceived of for the purpose of reviewing and updating the 2007 Territorial Agenda, the May 2011 [Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020](#) (TA2020) established a policy framework to bolster territorial cohesion in Europe, as a new goal of the EU introduced by the Lisbon Treaty. Among its objectives, it aimed to promote the mainstreaming of the territorial dimension across different policies and to ensure the implementation of the [Europe 2020 strategy](#) for smart, sustainable and economic growth, in line with the principles of territorial cohesion. It emphasised that the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy may only be achieved if the territorial dimension of the strategy is taken into account, owing to the differences in development opportunities that exist between Europe's regions. This point is significant as it established a clear link between territorial cohesion and the Europe 2020 strategy, helping to demonstrate how the territorial agenda can contribute to implementing the EU strategy for smart, sustainable and economic growth.

The document is divided into four sections. While Section I serves as an introduction, identifying the objectives of the territorial agenda, defining territorial cohesion and placing the territorial agenda within the context of the wider policy-making process, Section II outlines a number of key challenges for territorial development, including increased exposure to globalisation, EU integration, demographic and social challenges, climate change, energy and biodiversity loss. The main thrust of the territorial agenda is to be found in Section III, which identifies six territorial priorities for the development of the European Union. Defined as contributing to the successful implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, the six priorities draw heavily on those outlined in the 2007 Territorial Agenda.

A number of messages stood out in TA2020. In particular, the document stressed that cohesion policy provides a key framework through which the EU can address territorial development challenges helping to unleash territorial potential at local, regional and national level and deliver balanced territorial development. To achieve this, it called for greater involvement of the local level in the territorial agenda, urging regions and cities to contribute to common EU territorial priorities.

Box 1 – Six territorial priorities for the development of the European Union

Polycentric and balanced territorial development is a key element for achieving territorial cohesion. According to the TA2020, it is when the most developed cities and regions cooperate as parts of a polycentric pattern that they add value and act as centres contributing to developing their wider regions.

Encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions recommended applying an integrated and multilevel approach in urban development and recognising urban-rural interdependence through integrated governance and planning based on broad partnership.

Territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions considered that the integration of territories through territorial cooperation may lead to the better use of territories' potential such as natural, landscape or cultural heritage.

Ensuring global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies stressed that economic competitiveness may be enhanced by the development of globally integrated economic sectors and strong local economies.

Improving territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises argued that fair and affordable accessibility to services of general interest, information, knowledge and mobility are essential for territorial cohesion and supports effective inter-modal transport solutions.

Managing and connecting ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions emphasised that well-functioning ecological systems and the protection of cultural and natural heritage are important conditions for long-term sustainable development.

Lastly, Section IV identified a number of governance and implementation mechanisms to make EU territorial cohesion a reality, including the territorial coordination of policies and territorial cohesion

implementation mechanisms. On this last point, the document set out measures for strengthening territorial cohesion at EU level as well as strengthening Member States' contribution to territorial cohesion by encouraging them to integrate the principles of territorial cohesion into their own development policies and spatial planning mechanisms. The document concludes with a series of guidelines for future action, calling on the future EU presidencies and EU institutions to support the implementation of the TA2020, including a request for upcoming presidencies to identify the methods and actions needed to implement the TA2020, in cooperation with the Commission.

Assessing the 2020 Territorial Agenda

With the TA2020 document scheduling a possible review of the territorial agenda during the 2015 Latvian and Luxembourgish presidencies, a [report](#) was commissioned by Luxembourg in 2015 to assess the implementation of the territorial cohesion objective and the need to revise the territorial agenda. The report considered that the priorities, challenges and potentials outlined in the TA2020 were still relevant in 2015, with the document concluding that there was no need to revise the territorial agenda. More specifically, it found that the objectives of the TA2020 had been primarily addressed in regional and urban policies and, to a lesser extent, in environmental and transport policies.

However, the report also identified a number of shortcomings in relation to the territorial agenda. In particular, it highlighted that, with the exception of people working in the field of territorial development, there was generally a low level of awareness of the TA2020, at local and regional level and also in policy areas beyond regional and urban policies. Fragile intergovernmental cooperation was another issue, with the report noting that the successful delivery of TA2020 was not only dependent on levels of awareness but also on the resources and priorities of key players. In this context, the report highlighted that the implementation of TA2020 was often impeded by a lack of staff and funding. Lastly, the review found that the territorial agenda was complex and remained abstract, making it difficult to communicate the aims and objectives of the process in general.

The findings of the 2015 review of the TA2020 were reflected in the [conclusions](#) of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU on the occasion of the informal ministerial meeting on territorial cohesion and urban policy of 27 November 2015. Ministers agreed that the TA2020 was still valid and thus should not be reviewed at that moment in time, calling instead for the improvement of implementation and governance mechanisms, many of which had not been implemented in practice, and the intensification of communication efforts in the years 2016 and 2017.

Towards a renewed territorial agenda

Overview of the renewal process

As the Luxembourg conclusions of November 2015 had invited the upcoming presidencies to start preparing the development of a post-2020 territorial agenda together with the EU institutions in 2018, with the aim of concluding the process by the year 2020, an intergovernmental taskforce was set up in 2018 during the Austrian Presidency.

As part of this process, a group of experts met regularly to discuss the renewal of the territorial agenda. At a [meeting](#) of the taskforce in October 2018, it was agreed that discussions would continue on three previously identified blocks, with the first block covering work on narratives, the strategic scope and the political embedding of the post-2020 territorial agenda, the second focusing on modernising and updating the content of the territorial agenda and the third seeking to examine the governance and implementation mechanisms for the renewed TA2020. The overall aim being to formally adopt the territorial agenda 2020+ during the German Presidency in the second half of 2020, a timetable of action was drawn up, setting out a series of goals to be achieved during each successive presidency.

A number of meetings were held during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019, with discussions covering the first block of discussions on the narrative, strategic scope and political embedding of the territorial agenda, leading to the adoption of the [Bucharest Declaration](#) in June 2019, which, among other things, linked the territorial agenda to the urban agenda. This process continued under the Finnish Presidency during the second half of 2019, with developments including the creation of a dedicated [website](#) in September 2019, which provides details of all developments relating to the renewal process. At a meeting in Helsinki on 16 October 2019, the directors-general responsible for territorial cohesion agreed on the overarching objectives for spatial development for the decade ahead, with a meeting of the taskforce in early December leading to the formulation of a draft version of the territorial agenda for 2030 (TA2030), which set out its objectives and priorities. Alongside these developments, the Finnish Presidency organised an online survey open to authorities and decision-makers at all levels of government and related stakeholders to support the formulation of the revised territorial agenda.

Discussions continued during the Croatian Presidency at meetings of the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP) and of the directors-general responsible for territorial cohesion. Work then intensified during the German EU Presidency in the second half of 2020, with the final wording agreed at the 20 October 2020 meeting of the directors-general responsible for territorial cohesion, paving the way for the adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030 at the informal meeting of ministers for spatial planning, territorial development and/or cohesion of 1 December 2020.

Framing the discussion

Prepared ahead of a November 2018 Austrian Presidency seminar for directors-general on the future of territorial and urban policies, the [background paper](#) on innovative governance mechanisms for territorial policies at European level provided a good overview of the state of the debate at the start of the renewal process and set out a number of interesting pathways for future discussion.

Noting that the discussions surrounding the territorial agenda beyond 2020 revealed a certain consensus regarding the continued relevance of the challenges, aims and priorities of the TA2020, the document suggested that the territorial agenda simply required a slight modification rather than a wholesale revision. The general assumption was that, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the territorial agenda post 2020, it was vital to develop a governance mechanism for the territorial agenda i.e. to focus on the 'how' rather than on the 'what'. Accordingly, one of the main issues addressed by the document was the extent to which implementation partnerships similar to those existing under the urban agenda could be appropriate for the territorial agenda beyond 2020, with the text recommending that implementation partnerships need clear and strong ownership and leadership from participating partners or institutions, with the Commission playing a crucial role, and emphasising that the number of partners involved should be relatively limited to guarantee an effective working environment. Among the various options considered, the paper also put forward the concept of pilot regions, where certain functional regions with specific problems would be invited to develop innovative solutions. Under this scenario, pilot regions would effectively act as regional policy labs, with the document noting that such a combination of policy labs could create added value.

The paper also suggests closing the gap between the territorial and the urban agendas. Noting that the introduction of implementation partnerships under the territorial agenda could facilitate the launch of overlapping partnerships or policy labs with the urban agenda, the authors consider that closer coordination when selecting topics and priorities as well as overlapping or even joint partnerships or policy labs could be interesting new options.

European territorial reference framework

Aiming to outline a vision that can help frame the political discussion on the territorial dimension of EU strategic policies and cohesion objectives, including the renewed territorial agenda, the [European](#)

[territorial reference framework](#) prepared by ESPON was developed over a period of 18 months from November 2017 to May 2019, with the input of expert stakeholders, institutions and networks.

The authors considered that there was a need for a new narrative in view of the changes in the last decade, to help support thinking and action beyond administrative boundaries and to appeal to a broader group than experts already active in the field of territorial cohesion. In light of these changes, the document identified three key challenges to be addressed by the renewed territorial agenda: increasing territorial and societal fragmentation, where inequalities between places are driving people and Europe apart; growing interdependencies between places, where developments in one place affect development potentials in another and, lastly, the mismatch between the impact of social and economic developments and the geographical jurisdiction of decision-making. The study put forward a number of specific proposals for the territorial agenda, noting among other things that it should be underpinned by a policy framework that can promote engagement through action and projects that support cooperation efforts across Europe.

Voices in the discussions on the renewed territorial agenda

European Committee of the Regions

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has played an active role in the discussions on the renewal of the territorial agenda, adopting an [opinion](#) in October 2019 on the Committee's contribution to the renewed territorial agenda, with special emphasis on community-led local development. Echoing other voices in the discussion, the CoR considered that the territorial agenda post 2020 should not be a brand new document, as the existing challenges for territorial development, as endorsed by the TA2020, remain in general the same. Overall, the CoR saw the renewed territorial agenda as an opportunity to present a new and positive narrative for the future of the EU and the balanced development of the regions, with the Committee asking also that the new territorial agenda strengthen the territorial dimension in a wider range of policy fields and calling for closer links between cohesion policy and the territorial agenda. It emphasised that the new territorial agenda should continue to support the role of regional capital cities in providing equal opportunities for the development of their functional areas and support the role of small and medium-sized cities in achieving balanced, polycentric development across the EU, reflecting the importance given to polycentric development by other players.

With the visibility of the TA2020 a problem, the CoR called for a list of 10 to 12 key messages, written in easily accessible language, to be communicated by all Member States in order to familiarise the public with the new territorial agenda. Similarly, with a view to improving communication and organisation in general, the CoR underlined the need to clearly define the role of a potential territorial agenda secretariat or back office, with the territorial agenda identifying the objectives, tasks and budget of this body.

Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions

The Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR) has long called for the effective rollout of the territorial agenda. Its October 2019 [manifesto](#) entitled 'Regions at the heart of a reformed European Union', a key policy document adopted at its annual general assembly, argued that the EU needed a long-term strategy in order to achieve balanced territorial development through Europe, in line with the UN 2030 sustainable development goals, and to make the territorial agenda a reality and thus unlock potential at regional level. More specifically, the CPMR's February 2019 [technical paper](#) outlined three key messages regarding the renewal of the territorial agenda: there is a need to strengthen the territorial dimension of EU policies; all EU territories should be provided with equal opportunities for territorial development and, lastly, regions should be fully involved in shaping and supporting the territorial agenda.

On the issue of the involvement of regions in shaping and supporting the territorial agenda, the

CPMR highlighted the need for greater political ownership of the objectives of the territorial agenda at regional level. Noting that much of the failure of the TA2020 is down to the lack of political ownership of the strategy's objectives at local and regional level, it also drew attention to a number of other structural problems such as the weak implementation of the territorial agenda in EU policies as well as its low visibility on the EU agenda.

Territorial Thinkers

Territorial Thinkers, an independent platform of experts, also considered that the objectives of the TA2020 continued to be valid, noting in its November 2018 [briefing](#) 'Towards a Territorial Agenda post-2020' that the new territorial agenda should reiterate the need to work towards the six objectives of the TA2020 and update references to key documents. Recognising, however, that the challenges underpinning the original objectives have changed in recent years, the document also identified the need for a new vision for the European territory, a policy design to provide a direction and framework for territorial cooperation. In particular, it highlighted the importance of convincing key decision-makers that increasing the territorial dimension of policy-making is actually in the interest of all levels of governance and policy sectors. This could be achieved by ensuring that the new territorial agenda finds political support beyond ministers responsible for spatial planning and by strengthening links with the urban agenda for the EU. It also noted that the territorial dimension should not only focus on thriving territories but must also reach out beyond the usual stakeholders to get new players and 'ordinary' people on board as only then will it be able to work towards overcoming territorial and social fragmentation in Europe.

The importance of reinforcing the principle of territorial cohesion to prevent places from drifting further apart was also underlined in a Territorial Thinkers [briefing](#) from November 2019, with the authors urging the Member States to make the 2030 territorial agenda an important strategic instrument with a strong commitment for powerful application. Taken together, all of these documents and participants have fed into the process of developing the revised version of the territorial agenda.

Content of the renewed territorial agenda

Adopted in December 2020, the [Territorial Agenda](#) 2030 (TA2030) is divided into four sections, providing an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion in Europe. As set out in the **preamble**, it provides orientation for strategic spatial planning and calls for the territorial dimension of sector policies to be strengthened at all governance levels, seeking to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and achieve the UN's sustainable development goals in Europe, stressing also that territorial cohesion should play an important role in the Covid recovery process.

Entitled **why we need to act**, Section II identifies two key challenges for local and regional development. In a Europe where people and places are drifting apart, the first challenge relates to the existence of increasing imbalances and inequalities across the EU. With Europe's widening disparities taking on a spatial dimension, the territorial agenda brings these challenges to the attention of policy-makers, calling for action in areas such as quality of life, services of general interest, digitalisation and employment. The second challenge concerns sustainable development and climate change, and the increasing pressures on the environment. With global sustainable development challenges highly relevant for local and regional development and living conditions in Europe, the transition to sustainable development offers varying potential and challenges for different types of rural areas, towns, cities and regions. In this context, the TA highlights the need for action in such areas as climate change, loss of biodiversity, just transition or circular value chains.

These two challenges provide the foundation for the overarching objectives of the renewed territorial agenda: a **just Europe** that offers future perspectives for all places and people, and a **green Europe** that protects common livelihoods and shapes societal transition. These are

developed in Section III on **territorial priorities for Europe**, with the two objectives broken down into a total of six priorities for the development of the European territory as a whole (see Box 2).

Figure 1 – Two overarching objectives and six priorities of the TA2030



Source: Territorial agenda [website](#).

Box 2 – Territorial priorities for Europe

Balanced Europe encourages all levels to cooperate on responses to global societal challenges, enhancing working, living and business conditions in all places and strengthening EU socio-economic prosperity. Policy-makers will promote polycentric development models offering a role for all places, with action to encourage decision-makers to unleash the potential of territories with specific geographies.

Functional regions examines how cities and towns can drive intraregional growth and benefit surrounding communities by looking beyond administrative boundaries. It seeks to establish a dialogue with decision-makers in cities of all sizes to apply an integrated multilevel governance approach and engage with them to strengthen cooperation and address functional links between neighbouring areas.

Integration beyond borders is about how cooperation between places from different countries can harness development potential. It involves action to embed stable cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation in national, regional and local development strategies and boost dialogue with all policy-maker levels to coordinate sector policies between countries and reduce cooperation barriers.

Healthy environment supports the development of nature-based solutions and green and blue infrastructure networks that link ecosystems, in the area of spatial planning and beyond, and commits to strengthening the resilience of all places impacted by climate change. Its focus is to raise awareness and empower local communities to protect and reutilise their environments, landscapes and cultural assets.

Circular economy seeks to ensure strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world by supporting Europe's transition to a circular economy and to develop place-based industrial symbiosis and foster the creation of local and regional circular economy strategies. It will also encourage the diversification of local economies and boost innovation capacity in all regions.

Sustainable connections will support connectivity by inviting relevant players to a dialogue on the need for adequate access to high speed fixed and mobile communication networks in all places. Links between regional planning and the development of trans-European networks will be improved further, with spatial and transport planners invited to explore new models for local and regional mobility as a service.

Noting that the priorities spelled out in the TA2030 need to be supported by the actions of committed players, the fourth section of the document, **putting priorities into action**, states that,

taken together, actions under the TA2030 should strengthen multi-level governance, place-based approaches, coordinated sector policy territorial impacts and coherence, cooperation between territories, territorial cohesion at European, cross-border, transnational, inter- and intra-regional level as well as Member State and neighbouring country contributions to territorial cohesion, highlighting also that these points are closely related to the five principles of good urban governance outlined in the New Leipzig Charter. With application of the TA2030 reliant on informal multilevel cooperation, this section also outlines a series of measures to be taken by key players such as Member States, sub-national authorities, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank.

When it comes to **implementation**, the document emphasises that actions putting the territorial agenda into practice may be taken at any governance level and vary in character and focus, with each key player asked to take action implementing the TA in the context of their regular mandate. The document also highlights the role of [pilot actions](#) (see below), which should inspire actions across Europe, by demonstrating, testing and developing practices which contribute to achieving territorial agenda priorities through a focus on learning, sharing best practices, developing ways forward or implementation. All stakeholders are encouraged to follow them closely, take inspiration and put forward proposals for new actions. **Coordination** of TA activities will be carried out by meetings of the Directors General on Territorial Cohesion (DGTC), prepared by the National Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP), and supported by the Territorial Agenda Working Group (TAWG). The Territorial Agenda 2030 also sets out a number of **follow-up** actions for the forthcoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU to further strengthen communication, application and governance, with proposed measures including a communication to mark the TA's 20th anniversary in 2027, a discussion on progress on application of the TA, including the pilot actions, and a focus on a stocktaking in 2024, with reviews of the governance system.

Box 3– Six pilot actions launched under TA2030

Contributing to the 'balanced Europe' and 'functional regions' priorities, the first pilot action, **A future for lagging regions**, aims to strengthen economic, social and cultural anchor points in structurally weak regions in order to maintain and increase quality of life outside urban areas. With the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development as lead stakeholder, it will focus on services of general interest and test ways to effectively establish linkages with sectoral planning activities.

Led by Poland's Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, the pilot action on **Understanding how sector policies shape spatial (im)balances** aims to gain a better understanding of how different sectoral policies can shape spatial imbalances, focusing in particular on areas left behind and bringing the local levels to the fore, contributing in the process to the 'balanced Europe' and 'integration beyond borders' priorities.

The **Small places matter for spatial development** pilot action focuses on the key role of small towns and villages in the development of integrated territorial development processes, strengthening the territorial coordination of policies and cooperation between territories. Supporting the 'balanced Europe' and 'functional regions' priorities, Norway's Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation is lead stakeholder.

Showcasing Luxembourg's vision for a zero-carbon cross-border functional region by 2050, the **Cross-border spatial planning** pilot action aims to transfer a methodology for cross-border territorial visioning to other areas in Europe. Led by Luxembourg's Ministry of Energy and Spatial Planning, it focuses on Luxembourg's functional cross-border region, supporting 'integration beyond borders' and 'healthy environment' priorities.

The **Climate action in Alpine towns for citizens** pilot action will deliver a tailored support framework to enable the participating Alpine towns to test approaches for citizen participation in relation to climate change adaptation and mitigation in ongoing planning processes. Its goal is to show the potential and importance of low-threshold climate action in spatial planning, with the Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development as lead stakeholder.

Climate change adaptation and resilience through landscape transition focuses on integrated climate change adaptation (environmental, social and economic resilience), by planning and designing actions for a new landscape in order to reduce the risk of forest fires in Portugal. Led by Portugal's Ministry of Environment and Climate Action, it is linked to the 'functional regions' and 'healthy environment' priorities.

Preliminary assessment of the territorial agenda

With the TA2030 only recently adopted, it is still too early to carry out any far-reaching assessment of its content. It is nonetheless possible to draw a number of preliminary conclusions regarding the shape of the renewed territorial agenda and examine the extent to which the voices of the various participants in the discussion have been taken into account.

First, it would seem that the authors of the renewed territorial agenda have taken note of the general consensus among stakeholders regarding the importance of avoiding any large-scale revision of the TA2020. Not only do both documents outline exactly the same number of territorial priorities – six – but closer examination of the priorities under the 2030 territorial agenda's 'just Europe' objective reveals a number of striking similarities with the first three priorities of the TA2020. Accordingly, 'polycentric and balanced territorial development' has been transformed into 'balanced Europe' which, among other things, seeks to promote polycentric development models. Meanwhile, 'encouraging integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions', which recognises rural-urban interdependence through integrated development is now 'functional regions', which examines how cities and towns can drive intraregional growth and benefit surrounding communities and rural areas. Similarly, it is hard not to draw parallels between the third priority of the TA2020, 'territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions', and 'integration beyond borders – living and working across borders' under TA2030, which examines how cooperation between places in different countries can harness development potential.

Second, while acknowledging the continued relevance of many of the territorial priorities under the TA2020, the renewed territorial agenda also recognises that a number of new challenges have emerged since the adoption of the previous version of the territorial agenda in May 2011. In this context, the 2030 territorial agenda makes specific reference to the three challenges identified in the territorial reference framework prepared by ESPON and incorporates them directly in the document. Whereas the challenges of growing interdependencies between places and the mismatch between the impact of developments and the geographical jurisdiction of decision-making have helped feed into the content of the 'functional regions' territorial priority, the challenge of increasing fragmentation driving people and places apart is reflected in Section II of the 2030 territorial agenda alongside sustainable development, where it is highlighted as one of the two main challenges facing Europe.

Third, in light of these emerging challenges, the final text of the TA2030 clearly recognises the need for a new narrative or vision for the territorial agenda, a point that was also explicitly called for by numerous stakeholders including ESPON, the Committee of the Regions and Territorial Thinkers, among others. This is reflected in the structure of the renewed territorial agenda, with its two overarching objectives of a just Europe and a green Europe and, in particular, in the three priorities of the latter, which tie in directly with the objectives of the new Green Deal for Europe, the EU's new strategy for sustainable growth in the period beyond 2020. Where the TA2020 established a link with the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the renewed territorial agenda is seeking to place territorial cohesion within the context of arguably the two main challenges facing Europe today, keeping the EU together and ensuring its sustainable development, which has the potential to increase its relevance within wider EU policy-making.

Outlook

As highlighted above, the Territorial Agenda 2030 has clearly taken on board many of the ideas put forward by the various stakeholders and institutional bodies involved in the debate. These range from broad ideas, such as the need for a new vision, to specific ones, such as the Committee of the Regions' call for the renewed territorial agenda to support the role of small and medium-sized cities in achieving balanced, polycentric development, which is reflected in the reference to the crucial role of small and medium-sized towns in economic and social wellbeing at regional level and the invitation for policy-makers of all levels to promote polycentric development that offers a role for all places.

However, it is worth noting that a number of ideas put forward by stakeholders to improve the territorial agenda and around which there has been some consensus have only partially been taken up. Significantly, this concerns several long-standing challenges inherent in the implementation of the TA2020. One such issue is the need to ensure greater political ownership of the territorial agenda. While it is true that the TA2030 outlines a series of measures to be taken by the key players involved, questions remain as to the extent to which certain actions, such as the proposal for Member States to discuss progress on the territorial agenda at an NTCCP meeting 'every second year' can truly ensure greater political ownership. Similarly, when it comes to the challenge of how to improve the territorial agenda's communication and visibility, it is far from certain how measures such as communications on the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) can raise visibility given the low awareness of the ESDP outside specialist circles.

The issue of implementation and governance mechanisms, the importance of which was highlighted by the Luxembourg Presidency conclusions, has been partially resolved. The launch of the six pilot actions is a positive development, with the work of the partners involved acting as a model for other possible actions. Yet beyond noting that all are encouraged to closely follow pilot actions, take inspiration and come forward with proposals for new actions, the territorial agenda itself contains little detail on the form that such actions should take or their role in delivering TA2030, limiting itself to the assertion that action can be taken at any governance level and can vary in character and focus, effectively leaving it up to the Member States to decide how best to proceed.

In this context, the report on [Implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030](#), which highlights 52 examples of on-going projects that fit the objectives and priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030, prepared by the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, could help provide more guidance and stimulate the development of new pilot actions by offering insight on how to deliver the territorial agenda in practice. The coming months will be crucial for the development of the six pilot actions, which have the potential to lay the groundwork to support the future implementation of the territorial agenda, the importance of which should not be underestimated. In a Europe of ever-greater mutual dependence between places and an increasing mismatch between administrative boundaries and the territorial impact of policymaking, the multilevel governance and territorial cooperation put forward in the Territorial Agenda 2030 are arguably more relevant today than ever.

MAIN REFERENCES

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eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

