

TARGETED ANALYSIS //

LAKES

Framework concept
for the integrated development
of large lake regions

Annex to final report // October 2021

This TARGETED ANALYSIS is conducted within the framework of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme, partly financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

The ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by the ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

This delivery does not necessarily reflect the opinions of members of the ESPON 2020 Monitoring Committee.

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Acknowledgements

Language review by Tim Wills

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ISBN: 978-2-919816-26-2

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This document is a draft final report.

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The final version of the report will be published as soon as approved.

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Abbreviations

CF	Cohesion Fund
CLLD	Community-Led Local Development
EC	European Commission
EAFRD	European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
ECBM	European Cross-border Mechanism
EGTC	European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation
EMFAF	European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund
ERDF	European Regional Development Funds
ESF	European Social Fund
ESPON	European Territorial Observatory Network
EU	European Union
EWRC	European Week of Regions and Cities
JTF	Just Transition Fund
IBK	International Lake Constance Conference
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
NGEU	Next Generation EU
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Plans
NTCCP	Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
PO	Policy Objective
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument
ROK-B	Spatial Development Commission Lake Constance
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility

Executive summary

Large lake regions can be seen as ‘geographical burning glasses’. They concentrate competing economic interests, ecological concerns and vigorous socio-cultural identities. This ‘framework concept’ provides analytical results and policy recommendations to foster integrated planning in large lake regions and cooperation between them. It is based on enquiries in twelve such European regions and further participative processes organised with stakeholders from Lake Balaton, Lake Vänern and Lake Constance.

The first chapter describes the diversity of policy issues that are inter-twined in such regions and that frame spatial development policies in them.

- Large lakes are first described as ‘**pools of resources**’ where bio-physical assets (water, fish stocks, landscapes) and socio-cultural assets (cultural heritage and identities) require specific management measures and trade-offs.
- Large lakes are then considered from their broader inclusion in interregional and international circulations, as ‘**connected places**’. Accessibility from and to surrounding urban centres is a key factor when considering services of general interest around large lakes. Inclusion in international value chains and innovation are important assets for the vitality of the regional labour market.
- These ‘**fragile ecosystems**’ are detailed showing how manifold interests put significant pressure on lake-based ecosystems and biodiversity. Spatial planning may help resolve contradictions between the development of human settlements and activities and the preservation of water quality, ecosystems and biodiversity. A lack of adequate planning and governance may lead to overuse of material and symbolic resources associated with the lake.

However, policies and management efforts around large lakes often face political-administrative fragmentation. Large lakes are often shared between regions (e.g. Vänern, Mjøsa, Päijänne) or countries (e.g. Constance, Peipsi, Prespa, Maggiore, Geneva, Fertő-Neusiedl). This fragmentation may lead to inconsistent policies around the lake. Different solutions from cooperation initiatives up to governance frameworks deliver policies for the lakes and their regions. Based on an inventory of more than 50 such initiatives, chapter 2 highlights good practices for the elaboration of a common lake vision, recognition and valorisation of regional specificities and for community-led local development (CLLD).

The potential for balanced spatial planning is often inadequately considered in the investigated cases. Chapter 2 calls for two shifts in perspective for regional actors: from seeing the lake as a **subordinate** to making it a **centre of attention** and from the living with it as a **barrier** to **using it as a catalyst** of regional cooperation.

Chapter 3 makes concrete proposals to achieve these shifts in perspective and to work towards integrated development of lake regions. Twelve **policy options** highlight five dimensions of integration. They address both the ‘regional’ level (how stakeholders can contribute to integrated territorial development around a lake) and the ‘European’ or ‘inter-lake’ level (how stakeholders from a lake region can build their network and raise their voice to ensure that these lake regions are recognised at EU level). The following table provides an overview of the 12 policy options.

Table 1 Policy options for integrated development in large lake regions

Dimension	Denomination	Short description
Regional integration	Use EU funding to promote sustainable development	Sustainable development is an important policy objective in large lake regions. Lake regions should make use of EU Cohesion policy funding and the ‘Next Generation EU’ recovery instrument to support connectivity, SME competitiveness and environmental protection.
	Increase the use of integrated tools with EU Cohesion Policy	Specific tools such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), CLLD and other territorial strategies have proved effective in supporting sustainable development in various territorial contexts. Using these tools around large lakes could meet expectations from local stakeholders to be involved in implementing EU funds.
	Support cooperation beyond national borders	European territorial cooperation can support the implementation of projects in cross-border lake regions (Interreg A) as well as provide resources

		for lake-related transnational projects. Applying the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation instrument (EGTC) and the European cross-border mechanism (ECBM) could support services of general interest in lake regions.
Land-lake integration	Promote integrated land-lake management	Bridging the frequent gap between terrestrial planning and lake-based planning requires assessing critical land-lake interactions related to social, economic and ecosystem-based activities. The principle of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) applied in coastal regions and the ecosystem approach could both promote integration.
Policy integration	Strengthen the role of spatial planning in policy coordination	The limited availability of land around large lakes requires cross-sectoral trade-offs. Preparing a spatial plan for a lake region could trigger interactions between policy sectors and prospective thinking.
	Capitalise on integrated river basin management practices	EU large lakes are part of wider river basins whose activities are monitored through river basin management plans. Lake regions should capitalise on communities responsible for these plans to implement sustainable development beyond a strict understanding of water management.
	Establish and support lake-centred economic clusters	Economic clusters can help cooperation along territorial value chains. They can create additional value from lake resources, and the lake can be a catalyst (a common reference) to strengthen sectoral interactions.
Vertical integration	Link large lake regions to the Territorial Agenda 2030	The Territorial Agenda 2030 is a European strategic policy document for spatial planning and territorial development. A new pilot action with a focus on lake regions could be developed and launched with the next round of Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions. This would highlight the specificity of large lake regions in Europe and support place-based solutions in them.
	Illustrate contributions to policy goals	Highlighting the contribution of lake regions to EU or global policy goals would help to position lake regions in broader policy discourses. Two examples are the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Territorial Agenda 2030. This could be done by screening local and regional strategies, communication and a monitoring system for these regions.
	Empower local and regional players through capacity building	Policy integration and strengthening the position of lake regions in EU policies entails new requirements, especially for local and regional authorities. These include ensuring capacity to implement EU policies. In addition, different programmes and arenas could be mobilised by lake regions such as the EU Policy Learning Platform, Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX), the Smart Specialisation Platform and the EC Urban Development Network.
European integration	Raise a voice in Brussels	Having a unique voice in the EU policy debate could help lake regions to promote their interests in EU institutions. These regions could establish an association and set up a contact point, secretariat or office in Brussels. Such an association would provide a network for exchanging experiences, support lake-related events and be a contact point for EU expertise.
	Promote European exchange and learning	Exchange arenas and dialogue platforms can bring together local or regional development practitioners. An online platform for integrated lake development, working on joint projects and ensuring visibility at major EU events could raise interest and keep the discussion alive on the future of lake regions.

Introduction

Reflections on territorial diversity in Europe have developed over the last 20 years. The focus has been on categories such as mountains, islands, sparsely populated areas, cross-border regions, rural areas and areas affected by industrial transition¹. This document describes the value of adding lake regions to this list.

The analysis of lake regions across Europe has made it possible to identify recurring issues and opportunities. These can be classified under four policy fields with actions addressing specific challenges and opportunities:

- Water management: Climate change destabilises hydrological processes and makes river discharges and water levels more difficult to predict and manage.
- Ecosystem preservation: Lake biodiversity is affected by numerous factors, including climate change and human activities. Lake ecosystems play an important role in the global water cycle² through natural functional connectivity and relationship even beyond river basins.
- Development of tourism, leisure and residential functions: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected tourism patterns and settlement dynamics, with more local tourism and remote working.
- Large lakes as borders and connecting spaces: Inland waterway transport is receiving increasing attention as a potentially energy-efficient alternative to road and rail transport.

Such challenges and opportunities cannot be handled by local actors in isolation. Policy responses require extensive horizontal and vertical cooperation, often involving regional, national and European authorities. Sharing experiences and good practices across Europe could help with strategy elaboration processes, cooperation and the mobilisation of funding (including EU funding).

In this context, stakeholders from three large lake regions (Balaton, Vänern and Constance) have initiated an ESPON targeted analysis. This study compares current situations and strategies around 12 large lakes. It has focused on planning and policy practices that could foster sustainable integrated development, maximising the quality of life for inhabitants by balancing economic, environmental and social concerns. This includes dedicated strategies as well as other territorial and sectoral measures and initiatives for the lake region.

Lake regions are specific geographical objects that can be approached through spatial development policy fields (Section 1). Political and administrative fragmentation calls for adequate governance arrangements to manage lake regions (Section 2). This framework concept offers 12 policy options to promote integration (Section 3).

Large lakes in Europe

There is no standard definition of large lakes in Europe. Map 1 displays 'very large lakes' according to a recent typology (i.e. inland water bodies covering more than 100 km²). ESPON LAKES does not promote a geographic definition (e.g. with a size threshold), but acknowledges large lakes as a category which stakeholders recognise themselves.

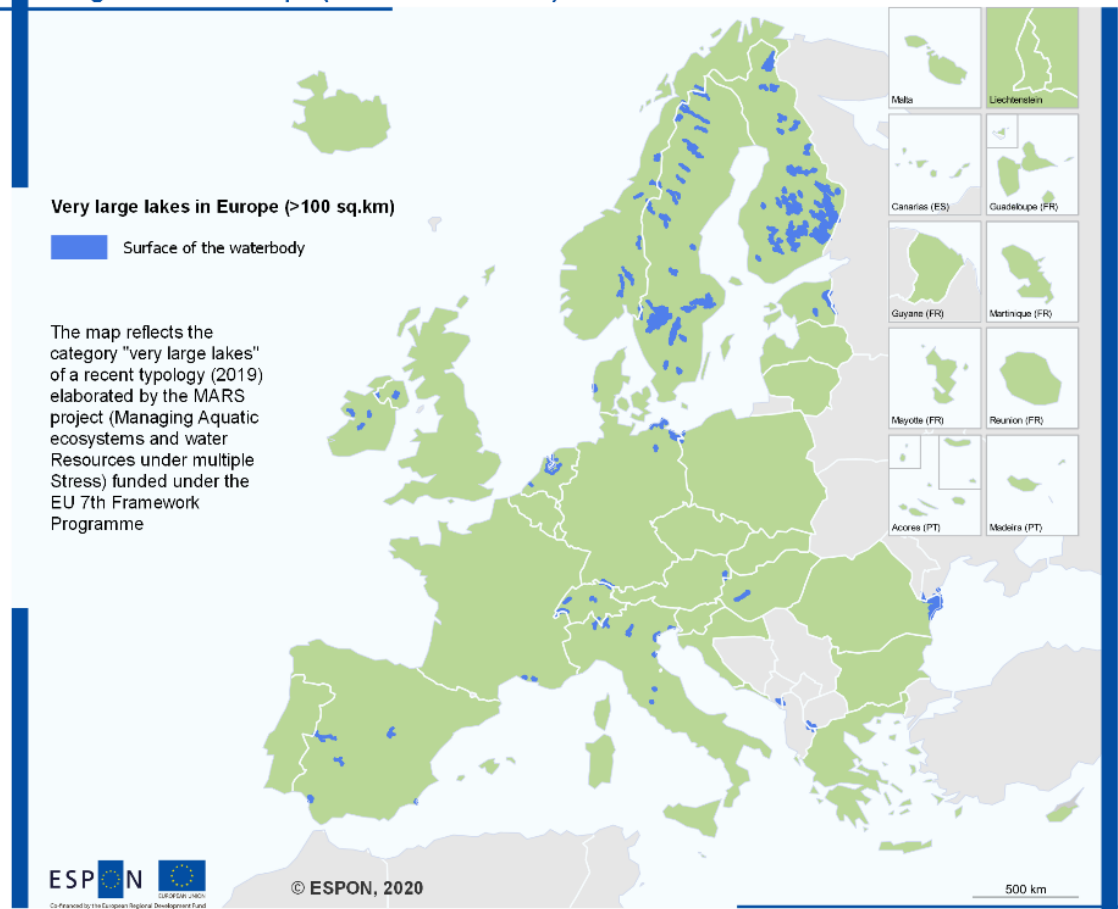
Cooperation initiatives from the following European large lakes were considered in the analysis: Balaton (HU), Constance (DE-AT-CH), Vänern (SE), Peipsi (EE-RU), Päijänne (FI), Mjøsa (NO), Lough Neagh (UK), Fertő-Neusiedl (HU-AT), Geneva (CH-FR), Maggiore (IT), Prespa (EL-MK-AL) and Étang de Berre (FR).

¹ These categories were introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and appear in article 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

² See:

Map 1 Large lakes in Europe

Large lakes in Europe (indicative location)



Origin of data: Lyche Solheim A et alii (2019)
 Source: ESPON LAKES, 2020
 © UMS RIATE for administrative boundaries

1 Spatial development in lake regions

As mentioned above, four function-based policy fields for large lake regions have been identified:

- Water management is organised around river catchment areas at different scales and the geographic distribution of human activities that impact, or depend on, water quality.
- Ecosystem preservation can focus on terrestrial and aquatic habitats and wildlife corridors, but this depends on delineating protected areas and the spatial organisation of settlements, transport axes, production sites and other human activities.
- Tourism development considers connections between the lake, its shoreline and hinterland, and nearby metropolises for day trips or short stays and more remote locations for longer stays. Tourism routes are also relevant.
- Transport policies consider embedding the lake in wider transport networks including non-waterway transport.

There are many types of functional areas around lakes and these may evolve over time. Integrated development in these regions may target a fuzzy area of cooperation around the lake to incorporate this multiplicity and variability.

At the same time, actors involved in strategy elaboration and implementation have their own 'geographies'. These include the jurisdiction and operation of institutions, business catchment areas, cultural and historic regions of particular relevance for individuals and representatives of civil society.

Lake regions are therefore constructed in dialogue between actors and delineated depending on the issues and objectives. This involves multiple considerations, including functional areas which often overlap with multiple regional and local administrative units. This is an important backdrop when considering long-term sustainable spatial development in lake regions.

To better integrate 'lake regions' as a potential object for European and national policymaking, we consider lakes from three perspectives: as pools of resources (section 1.1), connected places (section 1.2) and fragile ecosystems (section 1.3).

1.1 Lakes as pools of resources

Lake resources include all resources in and around lakes that can be used for economic production or consumption notably:

- Water, including for irrigation, drinking, bathing and energy production,
- Biotopes and lake-related food production 'terroirs' which are the basis for fisheries, aquaculture and farming,
- Amenities such as attractive landscapes, leisure and sport opportunities and living environments,
- Lake surface, e.g. for wind energy production,
- Local culture and heritage, as potential attractions for visitors.

The central objective of an integrated development strategy is to optimise and coordinate sustainable uses of these resources which presupposes:

- the identification of conflicts between different resource uses, as well as frameworks to overcome and manage these conflicts,
- the definition of development priorities, especially functions and resource uses to focus on,
- a common exploration of win-win solutions and practices, balancing negative and positive externalities of activities that coexist in and around each lake. Experience-sharing between lake regions can be particularly useful for this.

Dialogues on lake region resource exploitation may involve value chain stakeholders, as well as cross-sectoral exchanges on activities in the lake region. Strengthening circular economies in lake regions, which is

an EU-supported objective³, often implies rethinking resource exploitation models. More generally, increasingly strict regulatory provisions on greening economic activities create new conditions for economic activities in lake regions with greater potential for the coexistence of previously incompatible activities. Many lakes were polluted by industrial and agricultural activities during the 20th century. While this has usually improved, 'inherited pollutants' are a recurring issue. In parallel, new pollutants are being identified such as microplastics and pharmaceutical molecules.

Lake landscapes, natural environments and water are key amenities for the quality of life of riparian residents and for attracting new residents and visitors. However, overuse and inadequate planning leading to urban sprawl are recurrently identified as possible pitfalls. The main challenge is to make the heritage accessible to the wider public without destroying, overusing or selling it for commercial purposes. It is important to preserve related places, particularly their environments, aesthetics, landscapes and cultures, including the identities and well-being of residents. Furthermore, preserving natural and cultural heritage can also be perceived as an end in itself as it builds on the legacy of previous generations and is important to building identity around lake regions. Regulatory frameworks designed for these purposes are adapted to the lake's ecological sensitivity, as well as current and expected human pressures.

The main objective of lake water management is to ensure its availability and quality for extractive and non-extractive purposes by finding a balance between extraction and inflows while making optimal use of the water body. Water management includes the supply of fresh water, and the collection and treatment of wastewater to limit emissions of ecologically harmful substances. Beyond the scope of the lake, management can also concern exchanges with groundwater and rivers flowing through lakes. Water management in lake regions therefore targets not only the lake but the entire catchment area, influencing downstream and upstream activities such as flood regulation, irrigation, waterway transport and energy production.

Lakes are potential sources of renewable energy. In addition to using wind turbines to harness the unobstructed flow of wind over the open surface of lakes, a wide variety of water-related power generation includes hydropower at the outflow or wave energy. Such development often conflicts with other ecological and economic aspects by damaging the environment, views and transport.

Lakes are crucial for regional food production. They provide fish and other wild and aquaculture food but are also important for agricultural freshwater. At the same time, nutrient loading and eutrophication may contribute to lake water pollution. It is paramount to both regulate fish catches and support sustainable fishery-based regional development with the management of fish stocks including professional and recreational fishing which can involve competition and synergies. Beyond the traditional conflict between intensive agriculture and fishing with environmental protection, other economic activities such as tourism and leisure need to be considered.

Natural heritage comprises all habitats and species within and outside official protected areas. Cultural heritage includes immovable and movable tangible items as well as intangible aspects of high cultural value. Lake regions as sensitive marine and terrestrial ecosystems and areas of early settlement are rich in valuable cultural and natural assets that play an important role in multiple human activities. Most obviously, tourists choose lake regions to experience the natural and cultural heritage.

Lake-related assets provide the basis for the development of export-oriented economic activities. However, they are also a major component of quality of life in lake regions. They may be capitalised upon if other factors of a good quality of life are adequately addressed by public policies. Key such factors are:

- access to services of general interest such as education, healthcare, social services and retail of basic goods;
- management of seasonal variations in population, that may put pressure on infrastructure and service providers,
- protection of basic ecosystem services and amenities provided by the lake, e.g. freshwater, bathing water, access to the shoreline, lake landscapes,

³ https://ec.europa.eu/environment/topics/circular-economy/first-circular-economy-action-plan_en

- transportation infrastructure of sufficient capacity to avoid congestion, whose design takes into account natural hazards (e.g. flooding),
- preserved access to housing for local workers and households in areas that are attractive to second-home owners and tourists.

Such public policies help to maintain or increase the presence of a year-round resident population, which in turn leads to the development of a residential economy.

1.2 Lakes as connected places

Economies and social life around large lakes are largely determined by how they are integrated in exchange and dialogue networks, as well as the flows of goods and people to, from and through the region. Many lakes are interfaces between regions or countries. They can be a barrier, but also an interface when there are ferry connections.

With very few exceptions⁴, European large lakes and surrounding regions are at the outer margins of metropolitan areas or further from major urban nodes. This marginal position in relation to first tier cities does not prevent some lakes from developing a degree of centrality, often for tourism and leisure but also in other respects. How large lake regions position themselves in relation to metropolitan regions is key to their development including:

- Promoting residential functions, e.g. for long-distance (weekly) commuters, independent professionals, retirees;
- Developing leisure services for a metropolitan population (e.g. weekend trips, proximity tourism);
- Economic niches, such as capitalising on amenities to attract talent (e.g. specific research and development or higher education) or resources (e.g. food production, blue economy, lake brand).

Large lake regions also position themselves in broader international contexts, especially as tourism destinations. The high profile of some lakes functions as a brand, on which surrounding locations can market themselves.

Decision makers in large lake regions often refer to accessibility and connectivity as determinants of economic and social development. Good transport infrastructure increases the possibilities for a broader range of economic activities, drawing on better access to human resources, markets and advanced services. Challenges for transport development in lake regions include inland waterway connections, seasonal peaks of demand for public transport along and across the lake and soft mobility infrastructure (e.g. bicycle paths).

The prosperity of lake regions also requires strategic positioning in relation to neighbouring territories. Even highly accessible and well-connected large lake regions can become 'inner peripheries' with limited endogenous economic development dynamics. Tourism is a notable way for lake regions to be integrated in national and international value chains.

The review of lake regions highlights that dependence on tourism varies significantly. Some lake regions are well-established destinations with diverse offerings. Others are still developing lake-centred tourism, often in competition with city or mountain tourism and winter sports. Finally, some lake regions have little visibility as tourism destinations and are looking for ways to raise awareness of their untapped potential. Tourism needs to be complemented by other activities to overcome seasonality. Additionally, the ecological fragility of some lakes poses limits to tourism and the social and natural 'carrying capacity' of a lake region is therefore debated in many of these regions. Since the COVID-19 crisis, the development of a 'proximity tourism' based on one-day visits of people coming from nearby places is raised interest as a source of value and as a way to limit the pressure on local services.

A parallel issue is therefore the development of complementary economic activities. Critical reflections on the positioning of lake regions in relation to neighbouring metropolitan regions and the broader international context could help to fine-tune smart specialisation strategies for lake regions and their integration in global value chains.

⁴ Lake Geneva (Switzerland/France), Mälaren (Sweden)

However, for some lake regions, the combination of tourism, a well-performing knowledge-intensive economy and high population densities can generate specific policy challenges. Measures may be needed to address property prices, excessive land artificialisation and network congestion along lake shorelines.

1.3 Lakes as fragile ecosystems

Maybe to a greater extent than along rivers, stakeholders in most lake regions have become acutely aware that the lake is a fragile common which needs to be preserved collectively. Adoption of the EU Water Framework Directive in 2000 has contributed to further institutionalise joint efforts to preserve and monitor lake waters and ecosystems. Each lake has a specific spatial context, so ecosystems in and around lakes vary across Europe. Each lake has upstream and downstream rivers which must be considered. There are also links between lake regions and other places, as well as players outside the region that exploit lake resources. While conflicts between human activities and ecosystem protection are omnipresent in large lake regions, the international and national legal frameworks to manage them vary.

Preserving and monitoring lake ecosystems can be seen from three angles:

- Water management for monitoring and improving water quality,
- Nature protection, focusing on habitats and ensuring ecologically sustainable development,
- Spatial planning to balance different activities, interests and needs as well as to develop an integrated and comprehensive approach to the lake.

The quality of lake waters is key for the long-term viability of ecosystems and the sustainable development of human activities. Water quality monitoring systems are in place around all lakes, with various levels of integration depending on the institutional context. Different types of monitoring cover different functions of the lake: drinking and bathing water quality, as well as pollutants and eutrophication as a key factor for fish stocks and environmental protection. Monitoring may be by a unique body or decentralised, with different mechanisms for public authority oversight and control. River basin management plans as defined in the Water Framework Directive are used as a unifying tool to improve water quality.

Nature protection aims at the preservation and restoration of natural habitats and biodiversity. Large lakes and their surroundings host freshwater habitats such as rivers, creeks, smaller lakes, ponds, streams and wetlands (swamps and marshes) which host specific fauna and flora. These ecosystems may be threatened by human activities that generate pollutants, impact the landscape or introduce invasive species. Nature protection supports the stability of ecosystem services provided by lakes such as (a) fish and other products that can be extracted from the lake, (b) enabling people to live around lakes including regulating the regional climate, water purification and natural flood control, (c) non-material contributions to building knowledge, identities and societies around lakes, and (d) the preservation of natural processes such as soil formation, biomass production or nutrient cycling that underlie the other ecosystem services. Healthy wetlands have also been identified for their high potential for carbon sequestration and contribution to buffering the effects of climate change.

Altogether, the multiple interests, intense connections between lake regions and other places and the vulnerability of these regions imply significant challenges for spatial planning. Spatial planning aims at balancing different activities, interests and needs. Due to their size and importance, lakes are focal points of development with opportunities and challenges which need to be considered by spatial planning. The interests of tourism and secondary homeowners can conflict with residents' interests, including affordable housing and all-season services. There are also tensions along the shoreline, such as between building zones and retention areas or between public and private access to the lakeside. Further examples are synergies and competition between land and waterway transport with landscape preservation as a long-term objective to ensure beautiful views of and from the lake.

Spatial planning in large lake regions must coordinate terrestrial and marine issues. A lack of adequate planning and governance around large lakes may lead to an overuse of material and symbolic lake resources. As meeting points between players from different places, economic sectors and policy fields, large lakes require sound multilevel governance.

2 Delivering policies in lake regions

Policy making in large lake regions is fragmented between territorial units, interest groups and sources of legitimacy for action. Delivering policies in lake regions often requires to bring in decision-maker from different territories around the lake and multiple sources of expertise. Multi-level governance in lake regions implies an inclusive framework for action, this often involves soft territorial cooperation. This chapter provides inspiring or thought-provoking examples of cooperation to tackle lake-related issues.

2.1 Lakes between fragmentation and cooperation

Large lakes are often shared by several municipalities and regions, sometimes even countries. The consequences of this political-administrative fragmentation are manifold. Different areas around the lake may have followed different socio-economic pathways. There may be different funding schemes provided through regional development policies, sometimes creating synergies, sometimes partly or fully overlapping. Especially around cross-border lakes, diverse regulatory frameworks may increase the need for coordination because activities can influence development opportunities in the neighbouring territory. Water discharge into the lake or conflicting priorities for land and lake-use planning are notable examples.

This fragmentation around large lakes is both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge because it requires governance structures and processes to tackle lake-related issues, and an opportunity because large lakes can become testbeds for cooperation between places, sector policies and social groups. ESPON LAKES has shown there are several types of governance for cooperation in European large lake regions. Some patterns stand out, with the potential to resolve lake-related issues but also with some limitations. This section provides examples of such initiatives.

Lake-centred cooperation bodies support the elaboration of long-term common visions for a lake region as a whole. Hence, they contribute to an integrated perspective for the lake region. The types of actors involved and the kind of activities they carry out differ strongly between lakes. However, they take a broad multi-sector perspective and are entry points for those interested in lake-centred development.

Lake-centred cooperation in Lake Balaton Development Council

Established in 1996, Lake Balaton Development Council is a platform for dialogue and cooperation between organisations involved in developing the region. It contributes to Balaton spatial planning and regulations and to the regular update of regional strategies for Balaton. The Council is responsible for all areas within the Lake Balaton Resort Area (180 settlements, shared by three counties). Furthermore, the Council monitors economic, social and environmental processes in the region and provides feedback for spatial development. The work of the Council is supported by the Lake Balaton Development Coordination Agency which promotes development of the area for the Council. Over the years, the Council has become a focal point for spatial development around Balaton.

Intermunicipal cooperation is common around large lakes. This can play a key role for local development initiatives and strategic planning on lake shores. However, many initiatives focus on the lake and its shore, overlooking more wide-ranging functional relations with more distant places. These places can be connected to, or even dependent on the lake because of transport links, the same water catchment area or green corridors for flora and fauna. As intermunicipal cooperation is primarily funded by municipalities, they have limited financial capacity and may need to raise additional funds to finance these activities.

Intermunicipal cooperation around Lake Mjøsa: Mjøsbyen

In Lake Mjøsa, 10 municipalities from the north-eastern side of the lake, with the support of Innlandet County council, contribute to spatial planning and transport strategy for the territory. Mjøsbyen has organised workshops and project group meetings, compiled evidence and elaborated a strategy to manage daily mobility and urban development. All these initiatives contribute to the grassroot resolution of lake-related issues. The steering group also includes county governors (state representatives), municipalities, regional road administration for region East and the national railway administration.

Cooperation between local and regional actors is important in many policy fields. National regulatory frameworks often oblige them to cooperate or encourage integration between regional and local policy making. Water basin management associations are key players for implementation of the Water Framework Directive. These associations usually gather a wide spectrum of authorities, from national to local level as well as private actors and non-governmental organisations. Their governance and scope of intervention is defined by national regulations. Depending on the national context, they monitor and set objectives for water quality and inform the general public on water related issues. These associations can play a pivotal role in fostering multi-level dialogue between actors around large lakes.

Water basin management around Lake Vänern

The Lake Vänern water management association has established well-functioning working habits for the coordination of actors around the lake. It is a non-profit association whose members all use, influence, supervise or otherwise protect the lake. The association is coordinated by a Chancellery (Vänerkansliet) that coordinates, monitors and informs about environmental issues and activities in and around Lake Vänern. The association publishes a yearbook reporting on the environmental condition of Lake Vänern and an electronic newsletter. Since 2013, Lake Vänern Chancellery has also supervised the Joint Managing Group of Fisheries which regulates fish resources.

Also important around large lakes are bottom-up cooperation initiatives, such as community-led development groups. These can receive support from EU funds for rural development and fisheries to bring together local stakeholders for small-scale actions benefitting local communities and businesses. These tools are thus levers for bottom-up local development contributing to diverse regional economies and a better quality of life.

Community-led development around Lough Neagh

Lough Neagh Partnership Ltd is a successful example of a community led-development initiative. It was established as a non-profit company in 2003, initially for the purpose of administering a rural development grant funding. It gathers the five district councils that surround the lough, the private sector, community sector and special interest groups (fishermen, sand traders, estate managers). In 2011, after years of fruitful cooperation, the partnership remit was extended to cover a wider range of responsibilities including integrated management, marketing and development of activities relating to tourism, recreation, the environment, heritage and culture around the lake.

Cooperation initiatives also include grassroots alliances that work on individual topics and bring together local and regional stakeholders. Such alliances are efficient levers to support exploratory cooperation processes with a well-defined target, such as supporting the lake or parts of it to be designated as a protected area.

Grassroot alliances around Lake Päijanne

Around Lake Päijanne, during the 2010s there were two such alliances, for Lake Päijanne to join the UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves and for the Salpausselkä area to join the UNESCO Global Geopark Network. These are good examples of temporary alliances of local authorities, a business organisation and a research institution joining forces to promote the lake.

Many forms of cooperation are initiated and led by local or regional authorities. However, other forms of cooperation also play a role around large lakes. Non-governmental organisations establish networks to raise awareness of natural and cultural heritage, bring together like-minded associations from the region and create a critical mass, or to organise lake-based events. While the lake is an important reference point for many initiatives, others are not specifically lake-centred but contribute to local development due to their focus on environmental protection, for example.

Women for Balaton at Lake Balaton

The Women for Balaton association is a lake-based NGO that seeks to protect the environmental, natural and cultural values of Lake Balaton and develop environmentally conscious behaviour. It was founded in

1995 and includes 20 local groups. The network has become a prominent actor around the lake, taking part in information campaigns and networking events in the Lake Balaton region and the country, as well as cross border actions.

The private sector contributes to lake development and while businesses depend on the lake as a resource they also provide lake-related services. They can be involved in consultative bodies and form consortia with other businesses or cooperate with public players to provide services of general interest such as public transport on and around lakes.

The ‘Léman sans frontière’ initiative to promote lake-based tourism

Léman sans frontière is an interesting example. This association of tourism actors around Lake Geneva in France and Switzerland was established in 1997. It provides access to different tourism products under the same brand combining specific commercial offers from 29 partners in 2020, ranging from cultural institutions to historical monuments and leisure parks. A website (www.leman-sans-frontiere.org) features general information on tourism around the lake, specific attractions for members including discounts, upcoming events and details of accommodation, restaurants and public transport. These are visible on a digital map.

There are distinct patterns of cooperation around cross-border lakes. The international dimension of the lake tends to highlight issues that require unified decision-making to manage the lake as a common. Many cooperation structures are closely related to international agreements, especially for water management, fish stocks, transport and environmental protection. These agreements oblige national authorities to cooperate, though regional authorities may be invited to participate, especially when they hold significant decision-making power or rights in the fields covered by the agreement. Intense international activities on a cross-border lake may even lead to more stable cooperation frameworks, as around Lake Constance.

The International Lake Constance Conference

The *Internationale Bodenseekonferenz* (IBK, International Lake Constance Conference) was established in 1972. In the early years, environmental protection and water management were the main issues, but the focus broadened to overarching intergovernmental exchange. The Spatial Development Commission Lake Constance (ROK-B) was initiated in 2001. It works closely with IBK but is formally independent. It is currently elaborating a ‘Spatial Development and Transport Concept’ (*Zielbild Raum und Verkehr*) which aims to overcome cross-border frictions that hamper sustainable spatial development.

Another specific feature around cross-border lakes is a clear spatial focus of cross-border cooperation on few areas in only one country and not on the entire region. The main reason is that lake activities are not equally distributed but concentrated on a few segments in one country. Such imbalances tend to limit integrated perspectives on lake development in cross-border lake regions.

Imbalanced and one-sided concentration around Lake Fertő/Neusiedl

This imbalance is found around Lake Fertő-Neusiedl on the Austrian-Hungarian border. The Austrian part of the lake is a residential and tourism hotspot (notably around Podersdorf). It is commonly referred to as ‘the sea of the Viennese’. The Hungarian part of the lake is overwhelmingly covered by reeds, with only one beach and a few dockyards. This has led to different perceptions and representations of the lake and an imbalance in cooperation initiatives. For instance, the Neusiedlersee Card that offers tourism services in the region almost exclusively applies to the Austrian side of the lake.

2.2 From cooperation to integration

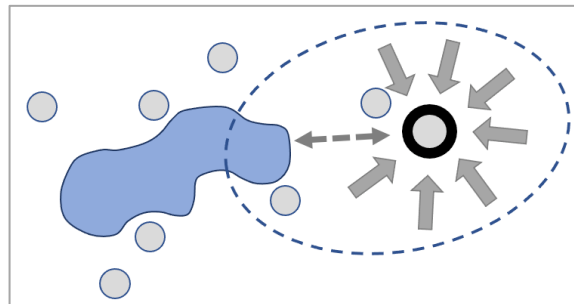
An overview of topics and policy delivery in large lake regions shows the role lakes can play in spatial development and the attention they receive from stakeholders. Many stakeholders focus on single resources or activities and do not necessarily consider the lake as embedded in a complex network of relations with other places, near and far. The diversity and complexity of stakeholder interests and perspectives as well as mutual interdependencies and reciprocal impacts poses an important challenge for sustainable development in lake regions. The aims are to ensure an integrated perspective in sectoral policies and to consider the manifold interrelations with other territorial scales and places.

Policy makers need to consider this diversity and complexity. It is important to bring all stakeholders together and strengthen the lake dimension in policies. This includes individual policy fields as well as transversal policies such as spatial planning. Only then is it possible to find a balance between divergent and competing interests and needs while respecting the natural limits of lake ecosystems. Well-functioning governance structures and better integrated policies can even contribute to identifying and exploiting new opportunities for regional development around large lakes.

Strengthening the integrated perspective of policies in lake regions requires two shifts in perspective. All stakeholders from local to EU level and from different sector policies should emphasise the lake as an integrated system, as a single entity. An example helps to illustrate the shift to transform lakes (1) from subordinate to the centre of attention, and (2) from a barrier to a catalyst for cooperation:

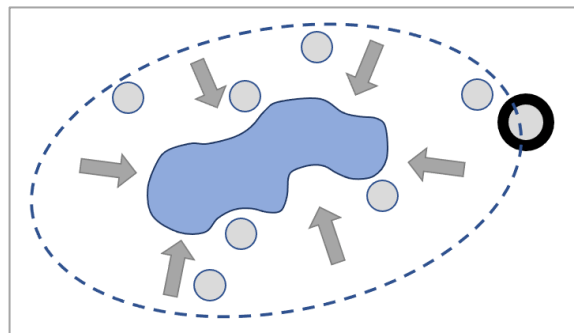
Stakeholders in metropolitan development might perceive the lake as important for leisure and recreation. They are also interested in good transport connections between the urban centre and spots around the lake for residents of the urban centre. They focus on how the lake can create benefits for the urban centre. However, they might not be interested in paying appropriate attention to repercussions of their activities on the rest of the lake. They take the lake for granted and do not perceive it as a planning object but as being subordinate (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Lakes as subordinate



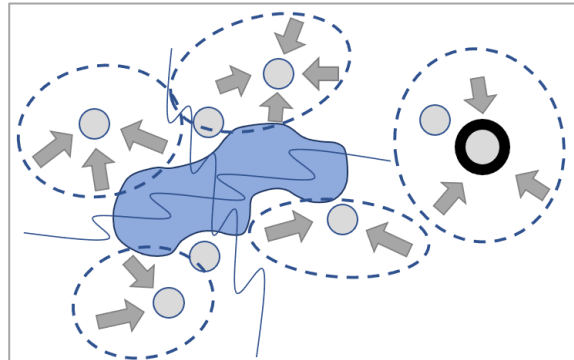
From an integrated perspective, the urban centre interest is only one among many to be balanced. Governance arrangements and mechanisms must be developed and put in place to acknowledge all interests, ensuring that the urban centre interest does not dominate the others. The functional geography to be considered differs between policy fields. While such an integrated perspective is inherent for some policies such as water management, others need to make additional efforts to make the lake the centre of attention (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Lakes as centres of attention



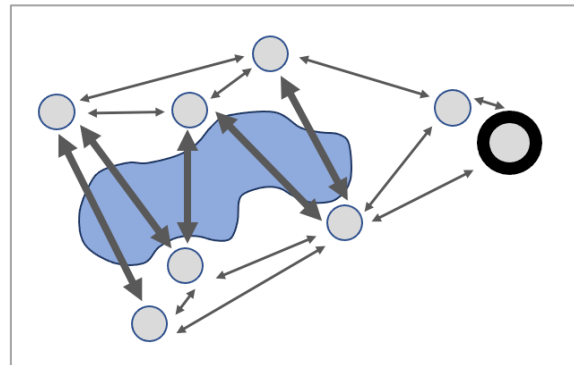
The second shift in perspective refers to the lake's influence on cooperation. If interests diverge between players and places around the lake, the lake might be perceived as a source of conflict and a barrier to cooperation (Figure 3). This is of particular relevance with administrative-political fragmentation. If there is no governance arrangement bringing together all stakeholders to exchange on developments, the lake might divide local places and people. A joint association covering the urban centre as well as smaller towns around the lake could be such an arrangement.

Figure 3 Lakes as barriers



Handled and perceived as a joint reference point and common good, lake-centred development can be a catalyst for cooperation and contribute to identity building (Figure 4). This does not imply that discussions on development opportunities are free of conflicts and all stakeholders agree on the future direction. Yet, the general mindset to lake development is different. The lake brings together stakeholders who are interested in working with the lake as a single entity and do not focus solely on their individual needs but acknowledge other interests. The policy options in the next chapter provide access points towards such a more integrated perspective for spatial development in large lake regions.

Figure 4 Lakes as catalysts



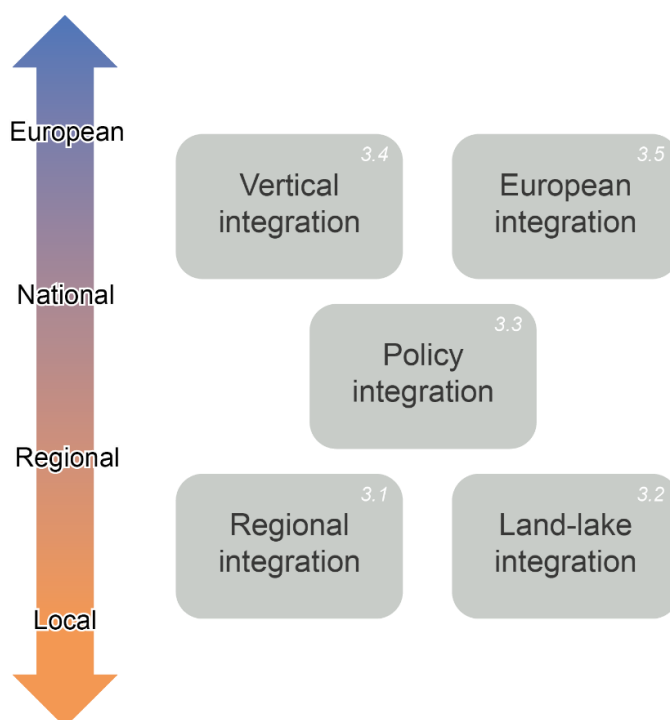
3 Policy options for integrated development

Integrated development in large lake regions aims at better acknowledging the diversity and complexity of developments and related policy fields. Relations and interdependencies between these policy fields and across administrative levels need to be considered in policy making. Balancing the different demands reduces environmental pressure on lakes and maintains them as valuable ecosystems for future generations. To break down the concept of 'integrated development', five dimensions can be further specified through policy options in the following sections:

- *Regional integration* refers to territorial cooperation between municipalities and regions around lake regions (section 3.1).
- *Land-lake integration* is a particular dimension of integration in lake regions and aims at managing relations along and across the shoreline (section 3.2).
- *Policy integration* refers to the variety of players representing different activities, needs and interests who should be brought together (section 3.3)
- *Vertical integration* reflects that large lake regions are embedded in multi-level governance systems from local to EU levels (section 3.4).
- *European integration* refers to the representation of interests of lake regions at EU level and in European communities of learning, exchange and capacity building (section 3.5).

This chapter provides policy options for stakeholders in lake regions and beyond (at national and European levels) to foster integrated development. The relevance and feasibility of each policy option may depend on the regional context. Not all policy options can be applied in all regions. Regional stakeholders will know which policy options are best suited to their needs and where they can implement changes. Each policy option has a descriptive section ('what it is about'), hands-on advice ('how to start') and references to existing initiatives or related studies ('practical examples').

Figure 5 Towards integrated development in lake regions



3.1 Regional integration – EU place-based policies and investments in lake regions

Regional integration is a broad objective that refers to territorial cooperation between municipalities and regions around large lakes. Given the European perspective of this document, this chapter only reviews how EU funding could be used to support regional integration around large lakes.

3.1.1 Make use of EU funding to promote sustainable development

What is it about? Sustainable development is an important policy objective in large lake regions. Two main funding schemes are available at EU level to promote sustainable development. These are Cohesion Policy with a track record since the 1970s and the one-off recovery instrument 'Next Generation EU' (NGEU) which was introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to EU primary law, the European Union aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion by reducing interregional disparities⁵. Cohesion Policy was created to achieve these aims and is implemented through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), Cohesion Fund (CF), Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). Drawing on resources from the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 with a total budget of EUR 1,074 billion, these five funds⁶ provide about EUR 344 billion to support five policy objectives (POs):

- 'A more competitive and smarter Europe' through innovative and smart economic transformation (PO 1),
- 'a greener Europe' for low-carbon transition, zero-carbon and circular economy (PO 2),
- 'a more connected Europe' by enhancing mobility (PO 3),
- 'a more social and inclusive Europe' with a focus on the European Pillar of Social Rights (PO 4),
- 'a Europe closer to citizens' involving bottom-up initiatives and integrated territorial development (PO 5).

For each fund POs are further specified through specific objectives. In mainstream operational programmes, two specific objectives under ERDF and CF are very relevant for sustainable development in lake regions. These are 'promoting access to water and sustainable water management' under PO 2 and 'fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas' under PO 5. Cohesion Policy is implemented under shared management by the European Commission (EC) and Member States. In several Member States, sub-national programme authorities are responsible for implementation. In countries like Germany, these programme authorities are more independent and decide themselves on the policy objectives and specific objectives they want to cover. Differences between regional programmes can be considerable. In other countries like Sweden, sub-national programme authorities are also responsible for implementation, but national coordination ensures few differences between regional programmes.

As a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the EU introduced NGEU, a one-off recovery instrument with a budget of EUR 750 billion. This is partly available to existing and planned Cohesion Policy programmes, e.g. to extend the 2014-2020 funding period to 2022 for ERDF and ESF programmes and to boost the JTF envelope for 2021-2027 from EUR 7.5 billion to EUR 17.5 billion. However, the main NGEU instrument is the newly established Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) with a budget of EUR 672.5 billion available through repayable loans (55 %) and non-repayable grants (45 %).

⁵ Article 174, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

⁶ EUR 200 billion for ERDF (including EUR 8 billion for European territorial cooperation (Interreg), see section 3.1.3); EUR 88 billion for ESF+; EUR 43 billion for CF; EUR 7.5 billion for JTF; EUR 5 billion for EMFAF.

Measures in six pillars can receive support from RRF: Green transition, Digital transformation, Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Social and territorial cohesion, Health, economic, social and institutional resilience, and Education and skills.

To receive support from RRF, EU Member States must draft national resilience and recovery plans (NRRP), which are assessed by the EC and approved by the Council. An overview of the current status of all NRRPs is available [online](#). The RRF focus is on green and digital transition processes. Hence, at least 37 % of each NRRP budget must be allocated to green transition and, respectively, at least 20 % to digital transformation.

How to start? Local and regional authorities in lake regions should systematically assess the opportunities offered by EU funding. This should be the basis for a dialogue with national and sub-national programme authorities to see how lake regions can best benefit from EU funding and, consequently, contribute to achieving the policy objectives of Cohesion Policy and the six pillars of the RRF. Measures under Cohesion Policy objective 5 – ‘a Europe closer to citizens’ – could be of particular interest due to the strong territorial and integrated dimension (see section 3.1.2 for more details).

Stakeholders from lake regions report that territorial fragmentation in implementing European Structural and Investment Funds can create specific challenges. These include a lack of cooperation between programmes covering a lake region, difficulties to mobilise stakeholders outside the programme territory and legal issues of including non-EU partners in projects. This can partially be solved by programme authorities appointing a person to look across borders, mobilise external actors and liaise with decision-makers.

Practical examples. In the funding period 2014-2020, Lake Balaton region benefitted from different EU funding sources and programmes that provided a range of investments for sustainable development in the region. The [online capitalisation tool for EU funding in Hungary](#) shows that 1,354 project contracts (worth more than EUR 900 million) were implemented in the region from 2015 to 2020, of which 83% focused on the riparian area. Tourism developments benefitted from large projects through the [Economic Development and Innovation OP](#) (ERDF, ESF). For instance, the 'Development of the Balaton Uplands cultural landscape as a world heritage site for tourism' project renewed and developed landmark buildings, public spaces, visitor centres and interactive exhibitions. 15 Balaton related projects (of 35 in total) were selected under the national call for 'Integrated product and service development in tourist-frequented areas' projects which largely benefitted the town of Balatonfüred. Finally a EUR 3 million project has supported rebranding of the Balaton destination in domestic and international markets. Other programmes were also mobilised including the [Territorial and settlement development OP](#) (ERDF, ESF) which supported the development of inland water protection systems and stormwater drainage systems, the [Integrated Transport OP](#) (CF, ERDF) supported TEN-T developments in the region (notably a railway along the southern shore of the lake) and the [Environmental and Energy Efficiency OP](#) (CF, ERDF) focused on habitat rehabilitation and modernisation of the outflow system of the lake (renovation of the Sió channel – EUR 42.5 million).

3.1.2 Increase the use of integrated tools within EU Cohesion Policy

What is it about? The regulatory framework for EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 includes tools to promote integrated territorial development, namely ITI and CLLD. In addition, tools that support initiatives designed by Member States can be used as vehicles to implement operational programmes that support sub-regional or cross-regional territorial development. To promote place-based policy making in large lake regions, they need to be adopted to the specific contexts, assets and development needs.

- ITI combines funding from more than one fund, programme or priority. Local and regional authorities are responsible for drafting the territorial strategy and being involved in selecting the operations to be supported. Territorial strategies drafted for ITI need to contain (a) a description of the geographical area, (b) an analysis of development needs and potential of the area, (c) a description of the integrated approach and (d) a description of the involvement of partners in preparation and implementation of the strategy.
- CLLD is rooted in the well-established LEADER⁷ approach implemented through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the second pillar of EU Agricultural Policy. Since

⁷ Short for 'Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale'.

the 1990s, LEADER has enabled bottom-up development action based on the participation of local businesses, representatives from civil society and local authorities thanks to partnerships known as Local Action Groups. Also relevant for lake regions are Fisheries Local Action Groups that support actions combining local development and fisheries with support from EMFAF. During the 2021-2027 period the implementation of CLLD strategies may receive support not only from EAFRD and EMFAF but also from ERDF, ESF+, and CF. The focus is on sub-regional areas with representatives of local socio-economic interests as the main stakeholders.

- Other territorial tools supporting initiatives designed by a Member State can receive funding under a single priority axis or even a single programme dedicated to PO 5, 'a Europe closer to citizens'. Such a priority or programme provides significant flexibility for interventions with an integrated focus. In the previous funding period 2014-2020, this tool was limited to urban areas. It can now be used in all types of territories, e.g. functional urban areas, rural areas, mountainous areas, islands, coastal areas and sparsely populated areas.

Integrated territorial tools can be applied not only within single countries but also across national borders. In the 2014-2020 funding period, CLLD strategies were developed and implemented in [four regions along the Austrian-Italian border](#) and the ITI tool was applied in the [Italian-Slovenian border area](#), between the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba.

How to start? Local and regional players in lake regions should check what integrated territorial tools are included in national and/or regional programmes. If integrated territorial tools cannot be used, the players should approach programme authorities to find what can be done to strengthen the local and regional perspective in the 2021-2027 funding period and beyond. Together, they can draft and implement an action plan. The starting point could be an assessment of the needs of local and regional players and should make clear which goals in large lake regions cannot be achieved under current Cohesion Policy and why better support is needed.

As the uptake of territorial tools is limited, programme authorities should provide background information and practical guidance to underline the benefits of the tools, illustrate how to apply them in lake regions and present insights from good practices. The Commission should raise awareness among programme authorities and could also create additional incentives and network events within or across countries. Stakeholders from large lake regions could contribute to these events with their insights and knowledge.

Practical examples. Since the introduction of the integrated tools, various analyses and guidance documents have been published, e.g. an [in-depth analysis](#) of ITI by the European Parliament (2019), a [CLLD guidance](#) for local actors by the European Commission (2018), a [study](#) on integrated strategies by the Commission (2017), a [study](#) on the implementation of CLLD under ERDF/ESF by the Commission (2017), a [briefing](#) on CLLD and ITI by the European Parliament (2015), a [report](#) with four scenarios for ITIs by the Commission (2015) and a [report](#) on the contribution of CLLD and ITI to the Territorial Agenda 2020 by the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (2015).

3.1.3 Support cooperation beyond national borders

What is it about? European territorial cooperation, 'Interreg', is one of two goals under Cohesion Policy whose main feature is collaboration between players from different countries. Similar to other EU programmes, Interreg mainly supports activities related to the five Cohesion Policy POs (see section 3.1.1). In addition, the Interreg-specific objective of 'better cooperation governance' can be addressed. For the 2021-2027 funding period, EUR 8 billion of ERDF resources for European territorial cooperation will be allocated to the following strands⁸:

- Cross-border cooperation (Interreg A) in neighbouring land and maritime border regions between EU Member States as well as between a Member State and non-EU countries like the Western Balkans or Russia, for example. More than EUR 5.8 billion (72 %) of Interreg funding is allocated to cross-border cooperation. It is of particular interest for cross-border lakes such as Lake Constance (AT, CH, DE), Lake Neusiedl/Fertő (AT, HU), Lake Peipus (EE, RU), Lake Maggiore (CH,

⁸ In addition to the three strands relevant for large lakes, a fourth strand (Interreg D) supports outermost regions.

IT) or Lake Prespa (EL, MK) and can support players around the lake to cooperate on development challenges. Interreg A can also be of interest for lakes in one country as long as they are within the area of a cross-border cooperation programme and play a role in cross-border development. One example is Lake Vänern which is within the area of the Interreg A programme Sweden-Norway (2014-2020).

- Transnational cooperation (Interreg B) is organised over larger territories or around sea basins. Each cooperation area covers several Member States as well as non-EU countries and overseas countries and territories. Transnational cooperation should receive about EUR 1.5 billion for 2021-2027 (18 %). Lakes within the same transnational cooperation area can use Interreg B to collaborate and learn from each other by exchanging experience, especially how players in each region tackle shared challenges. Various large lakes covered by the ESPON LAKES project are part of the same programme area. Under Baltic Sea are Lake Peipus (EE, RU), Lake Päijänne (FI), Lake Vänern (SE) and Lake Mjøsa (NO). Under Alpine Space are Étang de Berre (FR), Lake Geneva (CH, FR), Lake Constance (AT, CH, DE) and Lake Maggiore (CH, IT); and under Central Europe, Lake Balaton (HU) and Lake Neusiedl/Fertő (AT, HU).
- Interregional cooperation (Interreg C) aims at reinforcing the effectiveness of Cohesion Policy through specific programmes such as Interreg Europe, URBACT, INTERACT and ESPON. Interreg C can be used to bring together local and regional players across Europe and contribute to capacity building. About EUR 0.5 billion (6 %) is allocated to Interreg C. Participating players do not have to be within the same area or even adjacent countries. For further information on capacity building see section 3.4.3 and on Europe-wide exchange and learning see section 3.5.2.

Interreg provides financial support for local and regional players to cooperate beyond national borders. However, there are also legal instruments. An important tool in this context is the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). This was introduced in 2006 and allows public entities from a Member State and at least one other EU or neighbouring country to establish a joint organisational structure with its own legal personality. Players from different countries can act under a single name and tap new financial sources. To fulfil its tasks, an EGTC can employ staff directly, use staff delegated by its members and conclude contracts with external service providers. In large lake regions, EGTCs can be useful, for example to create and run a UNESCO biosphere reserve or geopark, or to operate a transport service across the lake.

Another important legal instrument is the European Cross-Border Mechanism (ECBM) which had not been adopted by October 2021, though the EC published the proposal for a regulation in 2018. The instrument should enable local and regional authorities in one Member State to apply legal provisions from a neighbouring Member State. This is however only possible on a case-by-case basis for a specific project in a predefined area. The basis of the instrument is that many legal and administrative obstacles hampering cross-border cooperation are due to conflicting national legal frameworks. The ECBM instrument, once adopted, will allow local and regional players to overcome such obstacles by locally harmonising targeted rules.

How to start? First, the potential added value of Interreg programmes for large lake regions should be assessed. The analyses provided by ESPON LAKES projects can be a starting point to review how challenges and potential can be addressed through Interreg-funded projects and which lakes might be most suitable for certain topics. While Interreg A is of particular interest for cross-border lakes, lakes in a single country might benefit from Interreg B and Interreg C. Furthermore, experience shows there are lake-centred cooperation projects already. These projects are, however, concentrated around a few lakes (see below). One access point could be to promote exchange and mutual learning among experienced players and especially between more and less experienced players across European large lake regions.

For the EGTC instrument, players who have already implemented projects could assess whether they want to intensify and institutionalise their cooperation, i.e. transform project-based cooperation to more stable and long-term oriented cooperation. Good examples of the geographical and thematic variety of existing EGTCs can be found in the documents noted below.

For the ECBM instrument, the main challenge is to convince Member State governments to adopt the regulation. If local and regional players from cross-border lake regions see added value in applying the ECBM instrument, they should approach the responsible ministries.

Practical examples. An analysis of cross-border projects in the [KEEP database](#) revealed that in the 2014-2020 funding period there were 32 lake-related projects.⁹ More than half of these were implemented around only two lakes: 13 around Lake Constance with support from the Interreg programme Alpine Rhine – Lake Constance – High Rhine ('Alpenrhein – Bodensee – Hochrhein') and four projects around Lake Maggiore by the Italian-Swiss Interreg programme. Among these, AMALAKE and SLOWMOVE prove that Interreg can be used to target lake-related issues.

The AMALAKE project is supported by the Italian-Swiss Interreg programme and runs from December 2018 until December 2021. It is implemented by three chambers of commerce and one tourist organisation. The project aims at increasing the attractiveness of Lake Maggiore and its surrounding valleys as a tourism destination. It focuses on collaboration between businesses, tourist operators and public entities with: (1) Networks of outdoor sports companies and operators and (2) green certification of cultural, sport and tourism events. A key output of the project is a [booking platform](#).

The SLOWMOVE project is also supported by the Italian-Swiss Interreg programme. It started in June 2019 and aims at promoting green mobility around Lake Maggiore, the Ticino river and canals. Activities under SLOWMOVE are very multimodal with electronic vehicle charging points, an online tool to navigate on Italian-Swiss waterways (including remote control of navigation locks) and cycling infrastructure. The project partners are two public authorities, a tourist association and a regional nature park.

For the legal instruments, the European Committee of the Regions hosts the [EGTC online platform](#) which provides detailed information on the EGTC instrument, e.g. a [booklet of good practices](#) and a [guidebook to registering an EGTC](#). More information on the status and process of the legislative procedure of the ECBM instrument is available on the [homepage](#) of the European Parliament.

3.2 Land-lake integration – where land meets water

Land-lake integration is a particular dimension of integration in lake regions and aims at managing relations along and across the shoreline.

3.2.1 Promote integrated land-lake management

What is it about? Spatial planning covers both terrestrial and lake-based perspectives. Although both can be generally found in spatial planning processes and instruments, only a few examples of lake-based spatial planning were identified in the ESPON LAKES study. The few terrestrial and lake-based planning activities are often disconnected from each other and if they are taken into account the focus is usually on single environmental aspects such as water extraction. There is a gap in many lake regions concerning the relations between the territorial parts (land) and the lake itself. Many water-related policies are smoothly inter-linked, such as for shipping, fishing and water quality. However, there are many land-related policies, coordinated to a varying extent by spatial planning instruments. Some of the latter treat the lake as a black box, for example in cartographic representations where the lake appears as one homogenous space. This prevents spatial planning from adequately considering land-lake interactions.

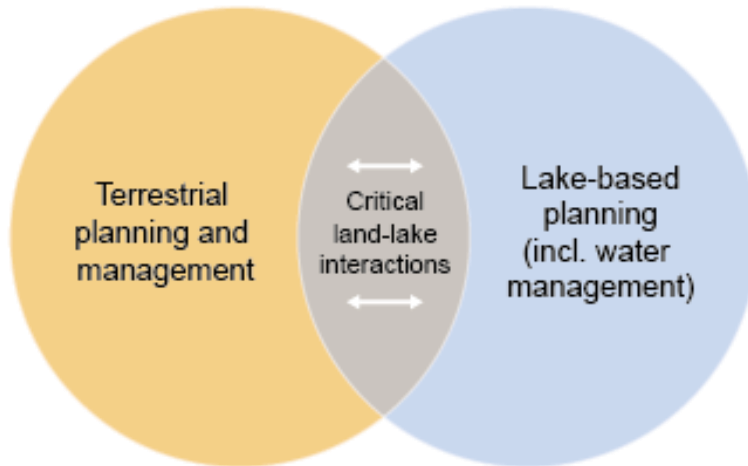
Integrating land and lake planning could make it easier to design and implement policies for activities on both land and water, such as tourism. It would also allow for a broader reflection on the carrying capacity of lake regions for different activities. Finally, it would be part of a broader effort to break sectoral policy silos around large lakes (see section 3.3 for more inter-sectoral perspectives).

How to start? There are two main starting points to improve land-lake integration around large lakes in Europe, one focusing on single lakes, the other considering common management guidelines for lake regions. First, in each lake region players should assess the relevance of the lake in spatial planning and other sector policies and how land-lake interrelations are considered. Afterwards, forums should discuss the gaps between terrestrial and lake planning and develop ideas to bridge these. Decisions could lead to a soft 'code of conduct' for spatial development or to legally binding management plans, as proposed by ESPON LAKES stakeholders. Players in each lake region need to find appropriate and processes for the respective

⁹ Based on a search for projects with 'lake' in the title.

geographical and political context. The second starting point refers to common management approaches for large lakes. Such approaches could be elaborated by stakeholders from lake regions across Europe. Defining principles for good management of large lakes would give some visibility to integrated lake management. It would further support exchanges of experience on large lakes. Such processes can be implemented as Europe-wide cooperation projects, e.g. supported by Interreg Europe (see section **Error! Reference source not found.**) or facilitated through online events (see section 3.5.2).

Figure 6 Integrating terrestrial and lake-based planning



Source: own elaboration, adapted from ESPON MSP-LSI

Practical example. Stakeholders from lake regions could be inspired by similar initiatives developed for coastal areas. ICZM is an approach that recognises a coastal area as a single entity and integrated system, shaped by both its marine and terrestrial components. The manifold interrelations and high interdependency between components imply a need for an integrated approach. The ten guiding principles laid down in the Protocol on ICZM in the Mediterranean adopted in 2008/2009 provide starting points for better integrated lake management, In particular the need for:

- Considering the complementary and interdependent nature of the marine and land parts;
- Considering all elements relating to hydrological, geomorphological, climatic, ecological, socio-economic and cultural systems to stay within carrying capacities and prevent negative effects;
- Applying the ecosystem approach;
- Setting up governance that enables participation and transparent decision-making by local stakeholders;
- Promoting institutional coordination across sectors and administrative levels;
- Developing land-use strategies, plans and programmes on urban development, socio-economic activities and other sector policies;
- Taking into account the multiplicity and diversity of activities, priority for public services and activities dependent on close proximity to the lake;
- Ensuring balanced allocation of activities throughout the region and avoiding unnecessary concentration and urban sprawl;
- Making early assessments of risks related to human activities to prevent negative impacts;
- Preventing damage and ensuring restoration.

Despite these principles, it is important to underline that there is no uniform approach to ICZM. Each scheme needs to reflect and be adapted to the specific geographical context, existing policy objectives as well as the needs and interests of stakeholders. Adapting ICZM to large lakes could trigger better institutional coordination through appropriate bodies and mechanisms, coordination between authorities responsible for marine and land parts, and across administrative levels through consultative bodies and joint decision-making procedures.

3.3 Policy integration – cooperation between sector players

Multiple players rely on the lake for their activities. The variety of needs might lead to conflicting interests and high pressure on the lake and its adjacent areas. This implies a need for cooperation between stakeholders and policy sectors.

3.3.1 Strengthen the role of spatial planning in policy coordination

Policy integration means bringing together stakeholders representing different activities, needs and interests.

What is it about? Various sectoral policies have a direct impact on lakes. Reflecting on implications supports harmonious spatial planning and allows sectoral policies to better incorporate spatial concerns. Expert analyses are only one basis for a common spatial plan. These synthesise socio-economic development patterns and trends, reflect on human and natural resources and aim at resilience in the face of future endogenous and exogenous changes. An equally important component is dialogue between stakeholders. These dialogues trigger collective reflections and identify solutions and development perspectives that emerge from consensual or controversial discourse. In parallel, mapping sectoral policies and regulatory frameworks for lake regions helps to identify the impacts and potential need for adaptation. The outputs are development objectives and corresponding implementation strategies, including land use principles and schemes, development axes/zones and settlement strategies.

Spatial planning has to integrate local and regional development strategies and sectoral approaches such as nature protection policies. In practice, complexities of multilevel governance and different calendars for the elaboration, adoption and revision of different policy instruments can generate inconsistencies. Moreover, implementation problems can weaken the planning approaches, often due to limited resources.

In this context, robust and collectively elaborated cartographic visualisations of lake region development trends can be important to enhance synergies and coordinate action. This can be done *ex post* with the support of a mapping tool translating principles and locational indications into maps. Participative planning tools such as the one being developed by the ESPON Programme (see ACTAREA Web App) can also help. This mapping tool allows stakeholders to build consensual images of their territory. The use of the Web App, with the support of an internal or external facilitator is well adapted to the context of a lake region and the involvement of players from diverse sectoral backgrounds.

How to start? As the LAKES project shows, lake regions and their contexts differ greatly. One of the most relevant challenges is 'political geography' frictions as the lake can be a barrier within a territorial entity or between territories. Depending on these contexts, the starting points can be very different. In many lake regions, sophisticated planning processes are already in place, but they lack cross-sectoral involvement. In rural areas, the intensity of planning procedures might be very low. In cross-border contexts, spatial planning is not a formal policy. More concretely, the starting points can be soft exchange formats ('roundtables') or stronger institutionalisations.

Practical example. Around Etang de Berre, a 'lake contract' (Contrat d'Etang) has been established as a common action plan. Etang de Berre is a coastal lagoon in Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur Region, near Marseille. The lagoon is affected by surrounding heavy industries, growing urbanisation and a hydropower plant which discharges a large quantity of freshwater that disrupts the ecological state. For decades distrust between riparian municipalities (that control urban planning), National Coastal Conservation Services (that monitor environmental protection), and the national electric company (that operates the hydropower plant) has prevented coordinated planning for the lagoon. A change was triggered in the 2000s based on a step-by-step logic. Since 2013, coordinated actions were implemented under the Contrat d'Etang. The contract is a strategic and operational document jointly elaborated by state institutions, municipalities and professional and user organisations. It coordinates measures taken by these actors in order to restore the ecological state of the lagoon, change uses and transform the image of the lagoon. It is defined as an environmental planning tool based on concerted and voluntary measures. A total of EUR 122 million of investments has been channelled through the subsequent programme.

3.3.2 Capitalise on integrated river basin management practices

What is it about? The EU Water Framework Directive (Directive 2000/60/EC) was adopted in 2000. It established the 'river basin' as a new geographical frame for policy design and implementation. For each river basin, a management plan identifies issues to be addressed, quality objectives and actions to achieve these. Objectives concern aquatic life as well as water and ecosystem quality. A systems approach is promoted so all ground and surface waters in the EU have a good status. According to the European Environment Agency, around 40 % of European surface waters have a good ecological status and 38 % a good chemical status. Reaching good status for all European waters therefore remains a major endeavour.

The Water Framework Directive is based on a systemic and integrated approach, in which stakeholder participation plays a major role. A wide range of actors are directly or indirectly concerned by water quality, because their activities impact water quality, such as manufacturing, agriculture and urban planning, or because they depend on good water quality, such as tourism, urban planning, fisheries and food processing. Climate change generates additional challenges to the preservation of water quality and can require actors to adapt their practices.

Against this background, river basins (or catchment areas) are increasingly significant. The systemic approach promoted by the Water Framework Directive encourages actors to assume responsibility for their impacts on water quality. They contribute to monitoring and are actively involved in the design and implementation of measures to establish or maintain good water quality status. With the Water Framework Directive, effective, efficient and robust models of multi-level water governance have become a key concern in Member States. One challenge is to combine top-down enforcement with bottom-up mobilisation and local capacity building.

The pursuit of integrated territorial development implies that dynamics organised on the basis of river basins (or catchment areas) are coordinated with other functional areas based on commuting patterns and value chains. The review of lake regions has shown examples of how integrated water-related policies overlap and coexist with integrated planning focusing on economic and social development or the preservation of ecological quality on land. This is complex, but can also stimulate integrated territorial development, as actors develop dialogue and coordinated action through their involvement in Water Framework Directive activities.

How to start? The systematic review of water governance models in and around lake regions including their interactions with economic and social development, can help to identify good practices. The objective is to define models for the restoration and preservation of water quality and use of positive local and regional water management externalities for integrated territorial development. This can be done by establishing a partnership between water users (business representatives), willing to engage in discussions on their (current and future) usage of the lake water. Good quality water is also a major component of the quality of living for local inhabitants for drinking water and bathing, so public participation can play a major role. This helps to promote responsible practices and increases pressure on businesses and public authorities to take appropriate measures.

Practical example. The Vänern water management association is a good example of actively involving local actors. This not-for-profit association is formally recognised as a 'Water Council' and is coordinated by a chancellery under the Västra Götaland County governor's office. It is a compromise between bottom-up and top-down approaches to water management. It produces 6-8 year water management plans and is funded by providing water impact monitoring for its members. Organisations that are legally obliged to monitor water impact naturally become members as it is a cost-efficient solution for them.

3.3.3 Establish and support lake-centred economic clusters

What is it about? Economic clusters are formal networks that aim at developing cooperation within a sector or that capitalise on a territorial asset. They bring together businesses, education and research institutions, local and regional authorities and representatives of the environment and civil society ('quintuple helix'). Clusters are key factors for producing, sharing and utilising knowledge, enhancing regional innovation potential and maximising added value created in a region. They support direct exchange and cross-fertilisation between regional stakeholders. Clusters can be an integrative tool for cooperation along value chains. They can also strengthen the visibility of regional businesses, especially with effective communication.

Lake regions have strong assets to capitalise on, leading to at least two types of clusters:

- *Clusters mobilising the lake as a resource.* Economic sectors with strong ties to the lake such as tourism, waterway transport, fisheries, aquaculture and agriculture, could benefit from a formal cluster. Examples are found [all over Europe](#). They directly depend on, and benefit from, the lake as a resource for their activities. Innovation projects can bring together lake-related actors, especially small players that rarely have the capacity to launch such activities. These benefit from initiatives creating critical mass and reducing individual investment costs and risks.
- *Clusters using the lake as a catalyst.* There may be economic specialisation in a lake region without direct ties to the lake. Clusters may support their activities using the lake to create a shared identity or factor to attract employees and new enterprises.

How to start? To set up a cluster, regional or lake-based economic associations could gather basic information on sectoral dynamics, as it was done by the Lake Geneva Union of Chamber of Commerce in a [study](#) on lake-based sectors of excellence. This can provide an overview of cluster potential around the lake which is especially useful for cross-border lakes where cooperation is more fragmented and knowledge about economic structures and players on the other side of the border might be limited. As a first step, regional development or smart specialisation strategies from around the lake could be compared to see where clustering would make most sense. A survey of businesses could test the idea and gather information on where entrepreneurs see potential for collaboration. It could also be a communication tool to highlight the potential benefits and opportunities of forming a cluster. From the beginning, public authorities need to support the initiatives. They could provide legal support or seed funding to actors forming a cluster, which could stimulate more complex and self-enforcing dynamics.

Practical examples. Based on the European cluster collaboration platform, there are few examples of clusters around large lakes building on local resources. One example is the paper cluster on the northern shore of Lake Vänern (Paper Province based in Karlstad). Two examples of clusters mobilising the lake as a reference space for economic development are around Lake Constance. CyberLAGO e.V. is building a network for the digital economy and BioLAGO provides industry-focused services such as training, meetings and consulting to pharmaceutical businesses. Originating on the lake shore, both clusters extended the territorial scope of their activities to gain more visibility. A number of blue economy clusters have emerged under the 'blue growth' umbrella which is also promoted at EU level. Examples are the Blue Cluster in Flanders (BE), Fórum Oceano - Association of Maritime Economy in Norte (PT), Bioeconomy at Marine Sites in Schleswig-Holstein (DE) and Pôle Mer Bretagne Atlantique in Brittany (FR).

3.4 Vertical integration – lakes in overarching policies

Vertical integration means large lake regions are embedded in multi-level governance systems, from local to EU levels.

3.4.1 Link large lake regions to the Territorial Agenda 2030

What is it about? The Territorial Agenda is a European strategic policy document for spatial planning and territorial development. It provides a framework for action towards territorial cohesion and a future for all places in Europe. The latest version, the Territorial Agenda 2030, was adopted at an informal ministerial meeting in December 2020 and six pilot actions were launched. These have a broad spatial and thematic coverage, from towns and cities to rural areas and cross-border regions. According to the Territorial Agenda 2030, pilot actions demonstrate, test and develop practices which contribute to one or more of six priorities (see

Figure 7). Pilot actions mirror the increasing importance of the place-based approach in policy design and delivery. Important elements are mutual learning, sharing good practices, joint working groups to develop ways forward and specific activities.

A new pilot action focusing on lake regions could be developed and launched with the next round of pilot actions. At first sight, the priorities related to 'Functional Regions' and 'Healthy Environment' seem very relevant for large lake regions. However, depending on the thematic focus of the pilot action, the other priorities could be important. As the state of play of pilot actions is regularly discussed by the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP) and the Directors-General responsible for Territorial Cohesion (DGTC), this would increase the visibility of lake regions at European scale and raise awareness of their specific challenges and features. At NTCCP and DGTC meetings, national representatives from EU member

states, Norway, Switzerland and Iceland are present as well as various EU institutions and bodies. These include DG REGIO from the Commission, the European Parliament, European Committee of the Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, European Investment Bank, ESPON) and other associations such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions.

If the debate initiated by the pilot action raises sufficient interest among NTCCP and DGTC members (a) EU Council Presidencies as hosts and chairs of the NTCCP and DGTC meetings could add lake regions to the agenda of a meeting or (b) a future EU Council Presidency could include lake regions in their programme for territorial cohesion. Two countries in this context could be Hungary (Lake Balaton) and Sweden (Lake Vänern) as they hold the EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2023 and the second half of 2024, respectively. So, there might be a window of opportunity in the next three years – if action is timely.

Figure 7 Objectives and priorities of Territorial Agenda 2030



Source: www.territorialagenda.eu

How to start? First, the main stakeholders of the ESPON LAKES project could agree on a draft for a pilot action. With this draft they could approach one or more NTCCP members, e.g. from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Switzerland/Liechtenstein, to ask whether they would be interested in developing a pilot action for lake regions. They could also discuss inviting other EU/non-EU countries, institutions and organisations to widen the partnership. Each pilot action is implemented under the leadership of one country but in close cooperation with the other countries, institutions and organisations. The proposal for the pilot action could be brought forward as a joint initiative by the countries as a follow-up to the ESPON LAKES project.

Practical example. Two ongoing [pilot actions](#) clearly focus on territories to achieve better cross-sectoral and vertical planning. One focuses on the role of small towns and villages for balanced spatial development. Partners from Norway, Germany, Poland, Finland, Ireland, Switzerland and the EC (DG REGIO, DG AGRI) work on new ways of bringing together bottom-up initiatives and top-down planning with a focus on demographic change and the attractiveness of small places for young people. The second example deals with climate change adaptation and resilience through landscape transition. It aims at preparing rural areas for extreme events (e.g. wildfires), fostering ecosystem services, mobilising endogenous resources and improving valorisation of the natural capital of these areas. More information on the state of play of the six pilot actions (as of November/December 2020) is available [online](#).

3.4.2 Illustrate contributions to overarching policy goals

What is it about? All local or regional policy measures and actions not only contribute to local, regional and national development and related policy goals, they also play a role in achieving EU or global policy goals. Illustrating how policy implementation in large lake regions contributes to these goals gives them more European and international visibility especially in policy discourses. Two examples are the 17 Sustainable

Development Goals adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and the six Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities adopted by the European ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion. Figure 8 shows how these two sets of objectives are interrelated and how contributions to one set of objectives naturally also supports the other.

Figure 8 Territorial Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals



Source: <https://www.territorialagenda.eu/renewal-reader/UN-SDG.html>

To carve out and emphasise the contributions of policy measures and actions in lake regions can involve different complementary steps:

- *Local and regional strategies.* An important starting point for policy could be to establish and underline links between the overarching objectives and policy goals in existing and new development strategies relevant for lake development, e.g. transport planning or regional development. This raises awareness among local and regional decision makers.
- *Dedicated actions.* The links should not only be with strategies but also with overarching objectives. These can be actions specifically developed for the context or those to be implemented anyhow. In any case, measures and actions should be close to citizens where the contribution is obvious.
- *Communication and dissemination.* Materials that present activities in large lake regions and how they contribute to overarching policy objectives should be drafted and disseminated. These can be printed products, online media and dedicated events, e.g., European Week of Regions and Cities, European Maritime Day or single local/regional events. The material should target different groups, from local citizens in lake regions to national and European decision makers.
- *Monitoring.* If actions are implemented or even embedded in a wider initiative, a monitoring system can follow the implementation process and demonstrate achievements. Such monitoring does not have to be complex. A few clear indicators are sufficient, especially if resources are limited.

How to start? This policy option can be implemented in each lake region separately. In addition, lake regions could share experience, set up a joint initiative or join existing initiatives to create synergies and improve outreach especially at overarching policy levels. Some existing platforms and events are presented below.

In the mid-term, more visibility of lake regions will also strengthen their position in policy discourses. A delineation of lake regions at LAU2 or NUTS3 level would help to compare where these regions stand in the European context, present the contribution of lake regions to EU or global policy objectives more prominently, as well as strengthen European lake identity. If the contribution of lake regions to EU or global policy objectives can be carved out and presented more prominently. This might even lead to more regular exchanges with the EC and other EU bodies increasing attention to these regions and their specific features and needs in EU policy making and publications such as [Cohesion Reports](#), the [RegioFlash newsletter](#), [Panorama magazine](#) or the [REGIOSTARS award](#).

Practical examples. (1) The United Nations [homepage](#) presents good practices that contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. (2) Engagement Global – a German non-profit organisation – hosts a [website](#) and organises events on sustainable development goals in German municipalities and regions. It also presents the Sustainable Development Goals in local and regional dialects. (3) The [European Maritime Day](#) is an annual conference organised by the EC with a central event and smaller events across Europe. It is a

platform for Europe's maritime community to meet, network, exchange and discuss on maritime affairs and policies.

3.4.3 Empower local and regional players through capacity building

What is it about? Policy integration and strengthening the position of lake regions in EU policies entails new requirements, especially for local and regional authorities. They must gather expertise on how to implement EU policies on the ground. To meet these new requirements, sufficient capacity is needed. This requires the capacity to collaborate with other players and think beyond individual expertise. It also concerns staff and money which can be particularly challenging for small organisations such as NGOs or soft territorial cooperation entities. To improve policy integration across Europe at all levels of governance, capacity building is needed.

Before designing new formats of capacity building for players from lake regions, existing programmes and arenas should be considered including:

- The [Policy Learning Platform](#) hosted by Interreg Europe boosts policy learning and capitalisation on regional development practices. It is open for policy makers from Cohesion Policy management authorities, local and regional authorities and other agencies, institutions and private non-profit organisations. It offers expert support and a good practice database but is also a knowledge hub and community of policy makers to exchange across Europe.
- TAIEX is the [Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument](#) provided by the EC. Its workshops, study visits and expert missions are open to civil servants, members of local and regional parliaments and legislative councils and representatives of social partners. TAIEX tools connected to the management of large lakes are TAIEX-REGIO PEER 2 PEER for authorities involved in implementing EU Cohesion Policy and TAIEX-EIR Peer 2 Peer for authorities involved in environmental management of the lake.
- The [Smart Specialisation Platform](#) hosted by the EC Joint Research Centre provides advice to Member States and regions on how to design and deliver smart specialisation strategies. It provides information, methodologies, expertise and other advice for decision makers from national and regional authorities involved in smart specialisation strategies.
- The EC's [Urban Development Network](#) brings together more than 500 cities and urban areas responsible for implementing integrated strategies financed by ERDF in the 2014-2020 funding period. This can be interesting for players from urban areas close to a lake. It can also be relevant for players from non-urban areas to see whether they can create synergies and/or benefit from expert knowledge and experience in the network.
- [fi-compass](#) is a platform for advisory services on financial instruments under European Structural and Investment Funds. In the funding period 2014-2020 these were ERDF, CF, ESF, EAFRD and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Financial instruments are repayable forms of financial support, e.g. loans or guarantees. The platform is hosted by the EC in partnership with the European Investment Bank.

How to start? Each lake should assess the competences required and whether they are already available from existing organisations in the lake region or in exchange with other organisations such as higher administrative levels. If this is not possible, a complementary analysis should assess how these competences can be obtained and through which channels. This process should run in close cooperation with local players and authorities to ensure that demands on the ground are considered and addressed. If deemed useful, each lake region could emphasise one specific topic and establish a community for mutual learning and exchange on the full range of topics. This would contribute to better alignment of capacity building to local and regional needs in these regions.

Practical example. Numerous examples and opportunities for capacity building are presented in the [Knowledge Hub of the Policy Learning Platform](#) (see above). The platform offers policy briefs, recordings of webinars and recommendations from peer-review workshops organised by the programme. 'Environment and resource efficiency' content can be very relevant for actors involved in water management, ecosystem protection and the circular economy around large lakes.

3.5 European integration – communities of European lake regions

European integration refers to the representation of lake region interests at EU level and European communities of learning and exchange.

3.5.1 Raise the voice in Brussels

What is it about? Lake regions have no dedicated and unique voice in the EU policy debate. Other types of territories have associations or offices that represent their interests to EU and other institutions. Prominent examples are [Euromontana](#) for mountain regions (see the practical example below), [Eurocities](#) for large cities, the [Conference on Peripheral Maritime Regions](#) or the [Association of European Border Regions](#). All these associations bring together specific types of European regions and municipalities. They raise awareness among EU policy makers and provide networks for their members to exchange experience and learn from each other. They also function as contact points for EU expert knowledge, providing access to information on EU policies. Furthermore, they represent their members to EU institutions and take part in EU policy processes. Finally, they organise events and conferences for their members and take part in events organised by others to disseminate new insights among their members afterwards.

To strengthen the voice of large lake regions at EU level, a contact point, secretariat or office in Brussels could be useful. Different options can be combined:

- *Office in Brussels.* Large lake regions could establish a new association with an office and staff in Brussels. This would entail maximum visibility but also require strong commitment from the members to cover rents, salaries, travel expenses and other costs.
- *Secretariat in a lake region.* Instead of a premises in Brussels, the secretariat of a newly established association could be based in a large lake region. An example is the [Association of European Border Regions](#) whose secretariat is in the EUREGIO premises at the Dutch-German border in Gronau/Glanerbrug.
- *Synergies with the Living Lakes Network.* The [Living Lakes Network](#) is a global initiative to protect, restore and rehabilitate lakes, wetlands and other freshwater bodies including their catchment areas. In Europe, 16 lakes are members of this initiative. In addition, there are national networks in Germany, Italy and Spain (nascent). The Living Lakes Network could be used to promote synergies and avoid duplicating structures.
- *Liaison office in Brussels.* To strengthen the visibility at EU level without a premises in Brussels, a regional or national representation to the EU could function as a liaison office or provide space for a liaison officer. Using existing infrastructure (premises, technical equipment, etc.) reduces financial and time resources.

All these solutions rely on a funding commitment by members, potentially through an association, a time limited contract or even an EGTC (see section 3.1.3).

How to start? Large lake regions should ask whether sufficient interest exists within their own networks to establish a new association, potentially through a short online survey. Interested regions should then initiate a discussion to identify common commitment, develop the organisational structure of a new association or assess how existing structures could be best exploited. In the preparation phase, it is useful to approach similar associations and learn from them.

Practical example. [Euromontana](#) is the European association of mountain areas with about 70 members from 20 European countries. Members include local and regional authorities as well as chambers of commerce, research institutes and development agencies. The association links members across Europe – from the Scottish Highlands to Crete and from southern Poland to northern Portugal – and allows them to contribute to EU policy making. The work is coordinated by a secretariat with a small team (3 staff members in June 2021) which is based in Brussels.

3.5.2 Promote Europe-wide exchange and learning

What is it about? Exchange arenas and dialogue platforms are important for building a community of European large lakes. They can bring together practitioners working on local or regional development with experts from various sector policies. Addressing different policies and levels of governance contributes to policy learning and policy integration. Such arenas and platforms can focus on a single lake region or

address various lake regions across Europe. They might also combine both perspectives and allow for both lake-specific and Europe-wide exchange in different formats including:

- *Online platform.* Online platforms offer a convenient framework for decentralised dialogue and exchange. One option is a platform similar to the EC island regions secretariat (see the practical example below). However using existing platforms may also be possible. A good example is the [Futurium website](#) hosted by the EC, dedicated to Europeans discussing EU policies. Members can discuss topics in theme-specific groups. An existing group is the Border Focal Point Network which brings together experts on cross-border development.
- *Cooperation.* Another access point would be to enable stakeholders from lake regions to cooperate on lake-specific topics. Such cooperation could be funded by European territorial cooperation, in particular through [Interreg Europe](#) which supports European local and regional authorities to share ideas and experience (see section 3.1.3 for further information on European territorial cooperation).
- *European Week of Regions and Cities.* Making best use of well-established events and platforms, the [European Week of Regions and Cities](#) is a suitable occasion to promote exchange. Interested parties can apply to organise a session during the event. Beyond dedicated sessions, participants can engage with practitioners and decision makers from all levels of government. In-depth exchange with decision makers from EU institutions and bodies would also contribute to positioning lake regions in European policy discourses.








How to start? To promote a joint European community of lake regions, a comprehensive review should be carried out of stakeholders in European lake regions. This should assess which platforms and arenas are already used by local and regional players in lake regions and determine the needs of potential users. A joint strategy for Europe-wide exchanges should then be developed. The objective should be to focus resources and activities on complementary platforms and arenas, rather than creating parallel structures and processes.

Practical examples. In May 2017, the EC and 14 Member States signed a political declaration on clean energy for islands. In 2018, the European Parliament and the EC set up a [secretariat](#) to support island regions and facilitate energy transition for them. The secretariat supports capacity building, networking, project development and exchange of good practices. It brings together communities of stakeholders working on islands across Europe and helps them to collaborate and learn from each other.

4 And now... where to start

The horizontal workshop held in the framework of ESPON LAKES has shown the motivation of stakeholders from lake regions to get involved in common activities to make large lakes more visible in the EU policy debate. One important aspect is that the policy options presented in this framework concept should be combined depending on the needs of regional stakeholders. They also have different challenges and opportunities.

For implementation, the following activities were identified as having the best cost-benefit ratio and could therefore be the primary focus of stakeholders.

	<i>Expected...</i>
(1) For individual lake regions, stakeholders could assess the relevance of lake strategies against overarching frameworks such as the Territorial Agenda 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Communicating on how aligned lake strategies are with these broader objectives does not entail major costs but can help promote the lake region to a broader audience.	<p>Cost</p>  <p>Benefit</p> 
(2) For individual lake regions, stakeholders could communicate with managing and national authorities responsible for EU programmes applying to the lake region. Such a dialogue should assess how to best take into account the investment needs of large lake regions based on a short-list of policy issues / gaps.	<p>Cost</p>  <p>Benefit</p> 
(3) Stakeholders from lake regions could revive the idea of a pilot action focused on large lakes and territorial development in the framework of the Territorial Agenda 2030. This group of stakeholders could draft a pilot action for open discussion with NTCCP members. Based on LAKES conclusions, such a pilot action could focus on 'land-lake interactions for integrated lake development', on 'harnessing synergies between spatial planning and water management' or on 'large lakes as test-beds for climate change adaptation'.	<p>Cost</p>  <p>Benefit</p> 
(4) Stakeholders could set up a networking platform for European lake regions (see policy option 'Promote Europe-wide exchange and learning'). Such an initiative could benefit from Interreg Europe support. This would enhance knowledge capitalisation and capacity building among the large lakes community, offer networking and exchange of lake news and funding opportunities, and finally raise awareness of the importance of lake regions for territorial development.	<p>Cost</p>  <p>Benefit</p> 



Co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund

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ESPON EGTC is the Single Beneficiary of the ESPON 2020 Cooperation Programme. The Single Operation within the programme is implemented by ESPON EGTC and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, EU Member States and the Partner States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.

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