



EUROPEAN UNION

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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

Policy Brief

# Governance, planning and financial tools in support of polycentric development

This policy brief on *Governance, planning and financial tools in support of polycentric development* is guided by the following questions:

- How can polycentric development be supported and exploited?
- What are the links and synergies between sectoral policies and polycentric territorial development?
- What are the tools and approaches for supporting polycentric development?

It aims to provide arguments and inspiration for promoting polycentric development to those who are engaged in developing and implementing regional development policies, the EU Territorial Agenda post-2020 and the future EU Cohesion Policy. This policy brief seeks to attract interest not only from traditionally engaged players such as policy-makers, professionals and academics in planning and policy, but also from national, regional and local politicians and decision-makers, and emerging stakeholders from the private sector as well as from civil society organisations and social movements.

This policy brief is based on the results of recent applied research and targeted analyses undertaken by ESPON – Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe (COMPASS), Regional Strategies for Sustainable and Inclusive Territorial Development (ReSSI), Spatial Dynamics and Strategic Planning in Metropolitan Areas (SPIMA) and Thinking and Planning in Areas of Territorial Cooperation (ACTAREA) – and by the Directorate-General for Regional Urban Policy (DG REGIO) Study: Integrated Territorial and Urban Strategies. How are ESIF adding value in 2014-2020?

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## KEY POLICY MESSAGE

ESPON understands polycentricity as a relational concept that encourages regions and cities, working with neighbouring territories, to explore common strengths and promote more functional links and interactions among places. Polycentric development can create critical mass by combining the efforts of urban centres, while delivering more balanced development between regions and more co-operative and functional urban-rural linkages.

Fostering polycentricity through cooperation is of the utmost importance in the current environment of increasing interdependencies between actors and institutions. The results of the ESPON targeted analyses – SPIMA, ReSSI and ACTAREA – conclude that there is no single governmental level that can fully meet the current social, economic and environmental challenges. Polycentric development contributes to creating a new culture of pub-

lic policy and public action by acknowledging similar territorial realities, sharing common challenges and searching for integrated solutions.

Facilitating territorial cooperation and networks towards polycentric development involving a large number of stakeholders demands a step further in the definition of governance, planning and financial tools. In order to do that, existing policy frameworks need to be revised and new ones defined at EU, national, regional and local scales.

Policy to support polycentric development should turn to the development of linkages and networks among territories with similar challenges – linked by common interests – rather than development of territories in isolation. Polycentric development requires giving privileges and enhancing the capacity of regional and local (sub-national

and sub-regional) levels of government in Europe to network in multiple shapes. While there are many vertical cooperation initiatives, horizontal cooperation is still underdeveloped, particularly, the potential of horizontal integration of funds.

The majority of the analysed case studies show different approaches towards networking and cooperation, but all of them have in common territorial proximity among the different stakeholders, whether the physical perimeter is fixed and permanent or it is fuzzy and flexible. The variety of cases proves that either *hard* or *soft* governance approaches can contribute to support polycentric development and that, once the culture of cooperation has become embedded in the way territories and stakeholders perform, it does not matter anymore whether the governance structure is legally formalised or not.

Furthermore, the current planning systems (both strategic and statutory) have to be adapted to the need to guide the development at the most appropriate geographical (functional) scales. This requires embedding the functional planning approach in the routine of planning practices of the public administration and sectoral policy departments.

Financial instruments should be designed to support the implementation of strategies designed for functional areas and make it possible to apply a multi-fund, cross-sectoral and partnership approach to support joint investment initiatives. In this regard, existing tools should be simplified and their flexibility should be increased, thereby encouraging their wider use and achieving better results with limited resources.

Finally, the complexity and the diversity of situations that coexist in Europe require deeper understanding of the current trends and of the impact that policies – and in particular EU policies – have on the ground. Such comprehension and understanding have to overcome inertia in the way we look at and analyse the reality, to propose new methodologies, to increase ‘the availability of data’ and to implement monitoring mechanisms on a regular basis. Big data and smart solutions (using information and communication technologies) are potential tools that have to be deployed in a democratic, transparent, accountable and participative way. More knowledge of the inter-relationship between morphological and functional polycentricity is needed, and therefore further studies have to be conducted.

## 1. Key challenges

A territory’s diversity can be an argument to unite or to divide, depending on the mind-set of its inhabitants and its politicians. In this context, polycentric development becomes crucial. Further support is still needed if we seek long-term networking, cooperation and linkages among territories. The following challenges have to be considered and taken into account.

**(I) Understanding and awareness of the potential of polycentric development.** The concept of polycentric development, simple as it may look, is a complex one, with potential to be interpreted in different ways or underestimated. The levels of awareness and understanding of the benefits of territorial networking cooperation are different among academics, among professionals and among the technical and the political levels of public administrations. Often, local administrations are suspicious of cooperation and networking because they fear losing their autonomy in decision-making about their territory.

Changing these attitudes requires strengthening policy tools, creating favourable arenas for cooperation and

expanding research and data available to develop an integrated vision of the benefits of polycentric development.

**(II) Deeper integration between sectoral policies and polycentric development.** Polycentricity encourages networking and cooperation among neighbouring territories in order to create common benefits across different political, sectoral and spatial interests.

There is much more focus on vertical than on horizontal coordination and cooperation. Horizontal coordination has yet to be achieved between governance structures and schemes that would further polycentric development.

The concept of spatial planning has yet to reconcile functional relationships between socioeconomic and physical dynamics. Therefore, the action fields and strategies of the government departments responsible for spatial planning and the departments responsible for economic development (other areas could be included as well, such as environmental protection, social issues, transport and mobility) should be more coordinated towards a shared goal.

(III) **Commitment and political leadership.** Governance for collective action requires great capacity for consensus building and long-term commitment supported by strong political leadership.

Political commitment is important to guarantee openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence as well as stability even when the political partners may change along the process. Political engagement is important for creating a favourable arena for dialogue and building trust among the stakeholders.

Engaging politicians and other influential stakeholders in a real cooperation going beyond general discourse and a broad strategic approach is not a simple process. There are many implicit hierarchies, as well as ideological positions and inertia, that are threatened by cooperation and coordination schemes.

Finally, the management of different timings – political cycles versus cooperation for long enough to achieve real

impact on the ground or tangible results – is also a key challenge to take into account from the very beginning in the design of the collaboration process.

(IV) **Resources allocated.** In a time of shortages and scarcity of resources, polycentric development has the potential to do more with less. In this regard, there are two challenges that any policy supporting polycentric development has to take into consideration: on the one hand, how to better integrate funding programmes and sources at the EU and national levels (e.g. the integration of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for integrated territorial development with other national sources of funding), and, on the other hand, how to better integrate sectorally focused funds (e.g. the cross-sectoral integration of agricultural policy funds with environmental protection ones). An additional challenge regarding financial resources is the allocation of regular/permanent funds by national, regional and local governments for long-term territorial cooperation and networking activities.

## 2.

# Approaches and tools for supporting polycentric development

Many European states, cities and regions have developed a variety of horizontal and vertical cooperative ventures around either single issues of shared interest or wider strategic issues. This is illustrated by the proliferation of institutional networks, partnership arrangements and governance inter-relations.

## Governance approaches and tools

New urban forms and configurations have emerged as a result of the continuous transformations of European cities from social, economic and environmental perspectives. Those transformations show that traditional governmental levels are facing increasing difficulties in tackling the *de facto* city and that a better *spatial fit* for dynamic and evolving challenges of urban spatial development has to be designated. In their attempts to find a way out by adapting traditional government structures, the *de jure* city to address the new reality, there are many initiatives among the Member States that see local governments working together and exploring different arrangements of territorial cooperation areas (TCAs), such as the

metropolitan areas. The discussion of a better *spatial fit* governance level is happening all over Europe and the solutions given are based either on hard means or on soft governance tools.

The variety of cases proves that either hard or soft means can contribute to support polycentric development and that, once the culture of cooperation has become embedded in the way territories and stakeholders work, it does not matter anymore whether the governance structure is legally formalised or not. In the former case, the TCAs will correspond to a fixed territorial boundary, while the latter will be driven by a thematic logic within a flexible boundary. There is no conclusive evidence to demonstrate which one is more efficient in dealing with cross-sectoral issues. Actors may choose to use soft means for strategic reasons, e.g. because they want to organise coordination and address identified challenges without creating an additional formal structure that adds to institutional complexity, or because they see themselves as complementary to existing and more institutionalised collaborations.

**Table 1**  
**Governance in hard and soft means, strengths and challenges**

HARD governance tools		SOFT governance tools	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More top-down approach characterised by a strong governance structure “imposed” from above.</li> <li>• Tied to legal procedures and statutory, financial and discursive instruments.</li> <li>• Identified boundaries engaging existing administrative structures.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More bottom-up approach and tailored made.</li> <li>• Based on ad hoc collaborative and often thematic agreements and project-based initiatives that are not legally formalised.</li> <li>• Spaces with fuzzy boundaries, where administrative regions do not provide adequate frameworks for “communities of intent”.</li> <li>• Focusing on communication, coordination and establishing coalitions for dialogue with other actors.</li> </ul>	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
They endorse state recognition and legitimise territorial cooperation areas, for example metropolitan areas, as the most appropriate territorial expression of the <i>de facto</i> city.	The formal status of the collaborative areas is not in itself sufficient to operationalise a collaborative planning approach in practice.	They mainly focus on identifying, structuring and promoting groups of stakeholders in a specific territory that share a vision of development.	There are no direct financial incentives at the regional or federal level connected to the formation of such associations.
They open the possibility of interacting directly with the national level.	The legislation has to go hand in hand with reforms in former institutions, including their jurisdiction, capacity and identity, and the operational and political power assigned to them.	It is easier to engage different type of stakeholders, such as the private sector and community organisations, and not only the different levels of government.	They demand a culture of cooperation that is not necessarily present in all the territories (cultural barriers).
They allocate regular/ permanent resources to a territorial level with the capacity to deal with basic services: transport, waste management, policing, etc.	They require a <i>cultural</i> change to adapt to the new cooperation schemes as better vertical coordination, for many stakeholders who are not only directly but also indirectly affected.	They are definitely the most flexible and adaptable schemes over time.	They require high levels of political, social and intellectual capacity.
	Their effectiveness as a coherent planning mechanism has to be proven, and proving its effectiveness would take some time.	They are completely oriented towards <i>spatial-fit</i> , the right scale for each topic.	They can create frictions with formal government structures if the topics of interest overlap.
		They allow a variety of forms of cooperation.	

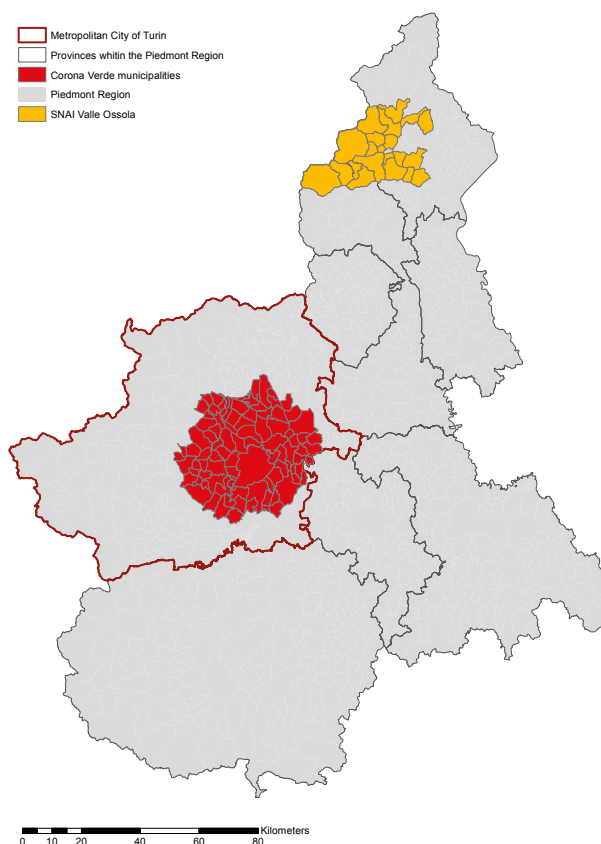
### CASE STUDY

#### Hard means bottom-up approach, Corona Verde project, Metropolitan City of Turin

- The project aimed to create a network of ecological corridors to connect the 12 seventeenth-century residences of the Royal House of Savoy. It evolved until the development of a strategic metropolitan plan became a priority.
- Corona Verde has contributed to the creation of a new vision for the Turin metropolitan area, improving the institutional capacity of the local level to cooperate as well as helping to develop a coherent regional landscape preservation and valorisation strategy.

#### Hard means top-down approach, National Strategy for the Inner Area of Valle Ossola, peripheral area

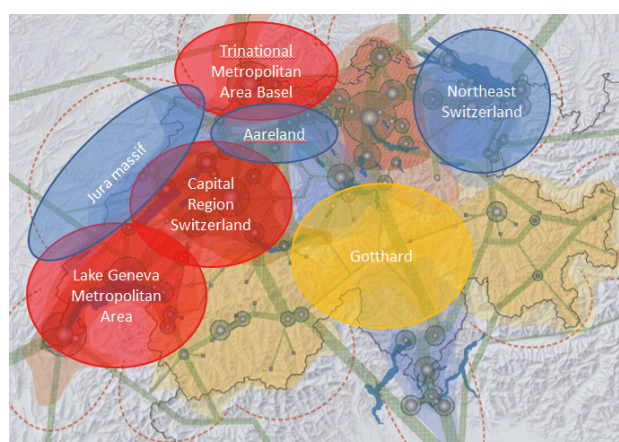
- The project aimed to implement the Strategia Nazionale Aree Interne (SNAI) in a peripheral area of the Piedmont region.
- The SNAI, having been developed in a phase of strong centralisation under a technical “caretaking” government, has a strong top-down flavour and is characterised by a strong governance structure imposed from above.
- The main tool for implementing the initiative is the project framework agreement (PFA) signed by the region, local bodies and the Central Coordination Administration.



### CASE STUDY

#### Soft means, Swiss Action Areas

- Action areas (AAs) are oriented to carrying out the Swiss Spatial Strategy.
- AAs are based on networks of cities and target specific territorial aspects of metropolitan areas, polycentric networks or Alpine and rural contexts. AAs carry out several sectoral collaborations between different territories: cantons, municipalities and countries.
- AAs are often organised around economic, industrial and transport nodes. Cooperation is usually based on previous existing collaborations. Swiss supra-regional cooperation initiatives – soft territorial cooperation – could also take forward the implementation of the action areas.



## Planning approaches and tools

The findings of SPIMA and COMPASS show that since 2000 there has been a very significant reform in the struc-

ture of government and in the distribution of planning powers among levels of government in many Member States. Despite all the efforts of decentralisation and

regionalisation of planning, the current planning systems seem insufficient to establish and maintain coordinated polycentric development in general, and metropolitan planning in particular. A metropolitan planning approach is not yet firmly institutionalised and/or not fully embed-

ded in the routine of planning practices of the public administration and sectoral policy departments.

In order to explore more deeply the planning tools to support polycentric development, one has to distinguish between strategic and statutory planning tools.

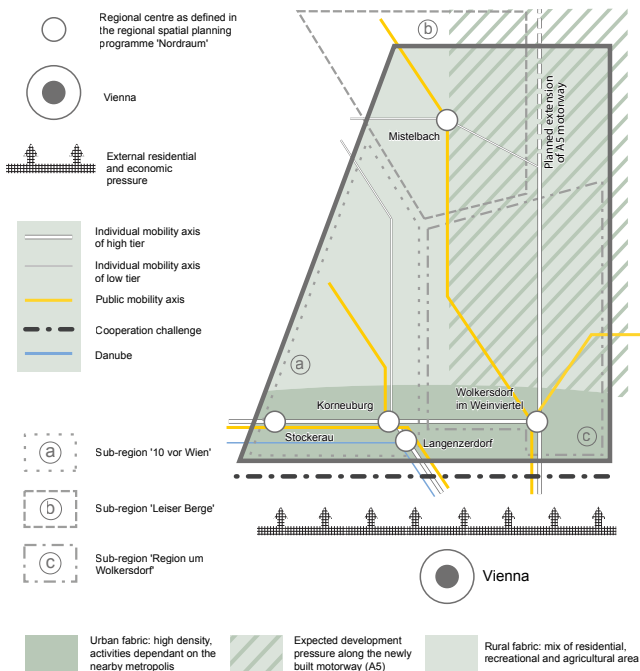
**Table 2**  
**Strategic and statutory planning, strengths and challenges**

STRATEGIC PLANNING		STATUTORY PLANNING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops a joint strategic document or a framework for a specific territory or with regard to a specific issue.</li> <li>• Generates secondary decision-making processes by a wide variety of actors, often using a strong place-based approach.</li> <li>• Serves as a strategic framework for planning and implementing integrated territorial investment (ITI), sustainable urban development (SUD) and community-led local development (CLLD) projects.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented through the development of regional spatial plans, master plans and detailed municipal land use plans.</li> <li>• The national governments mostly provide a general direction for spatial development and the set of rules for the lower level of government by means of guidance, legislative power (laws), strategies and policies.</li> <li>• Spatial planning tools that have as their main purpose the transformation of space have not yet been adapted to fit polycentric planning.</li> <li>• There have been limited and fragmented initiatives on spatial planning at the functional urban scale.</li> <li>• The current institutional structures of spatial planning, in particular, seem insufficient to establish and maintain coordinated planning.</li> </ul>	
STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
The leadership or initiative can come from different stakeholders and the collaboration can vary between public, public-private, non-profit, mixed or even only private.	SPTs are not always directly linked to the formal (statutory) process of decision-making in particular for spatial planning.	They restrict the exclusive rights of landowners in favour of the public interest.	There is poor coordination with other plans at different planning scales.
Horizontal and vertical cooperation within the administration does not have to follow a hierarchical path.	They have a limited capacity to influence other planning tools and are strongly exposed to political changes.	They establish the rules of the game to provide legal certainty.	It is difficult to include socioeconomic and environmental issues.
SPTs can easily embed or integrate cross-sectorial issues (social, economic development, environmental, mobility, urban growth, etc.) and many different types of stakeholders (e.g. private sector, NGOs, community associations, labour unions, etc.).	SPTs oriented towards project-based initiatives are not a durable formalisation of a metropolitan area or other territorial arrangement.	Professionals and planners involved in the definition of spatial planning tools are supporters of polycentric development.	Coordination and cooperation are perceived as interference with municipal autonomy.
SPTs facilitate reaching joint agreements on specific issues. SPTs are flexible and adaptable to enlarge the number of stakeholders included, since they can easily evolve over time.	They lack, with certain exceptions (namely ITI), financial resources.		In some countries, responsibility for spatial planning is linked to taxation (the right to build and property taxes) at the local level. This becomes a real obstacle for cooperation.

## CASE STUDY

### Strategic planning, region north of Vienna

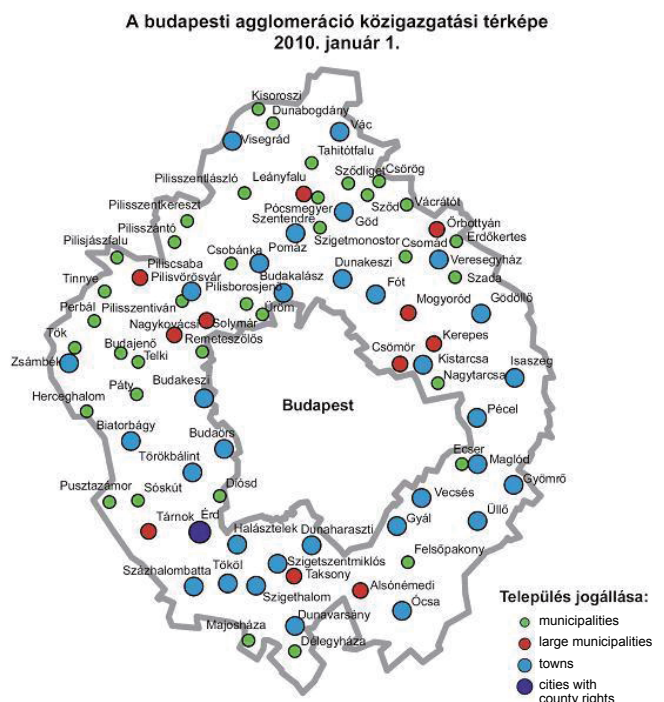
- Vienna displays a variety of different territorial arrangements supporting cooperation and polycentric development.
- They are driven mostly by sectoral policies such as monitoring urban growth, integrated public transport, waste management or economic development.
- The *Stadtregion+*, comprising 238 municipalities, forms a basis for strategic planning at this level.
- The VOR (*Verkehrsbund Ostregion*) is an integrated transport system shared by three regions whose total population is almost double that of the *Stadtregion+*. Functional linkages can also be put into an organisational framework by local municipalities, such as waste management or economic development.
- In Vienna, territorial cooperation areas are not attached to a single fixed territorial configuration but are the result of the best spatial fit for each objective or issue of cooperation.



## CASE STUDY

### Statutory planning, Budapest agglomeration

- Planning for Budapest has a rather formal character.
- This formality is mainly because the aim of the cooperation between the various institutions and other partners was to draw up thematic development programmes, which are intended to be basic documents that lay down joint development directions and serve to identify and prepare projects implemented with European Union funding.
- Before government approval, the strategies and programmes were debated and accepted by a decision-making body composed of the leaders (mayors and delegates) of the Budapest local government and the 23 district governments.
- In recent years, an integrated urban development strategy has been introduced purely experimentally.
- The thematic development programmes, as a new planning tool, and the cooperative way in which they were drawn up have been considered a good model for subsequent planning cooperation on the conurbation level, if the Central Hungary statistical region is split into two separate NUTS2 units.





## Smart specialisation strategy

Among strategic-planning approaches and tools, a smart specialisation strategy (S3) is oriented to build competitive advantages by developing research and innovation strengths in a territory to match its business needs, in order to address emerging opportunities and market developments in a coherent manner.

An S3 is not just a government investment strategy but an entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) in which the relevant actions rely on activities that reinforce and match regional entrepreneurial vision and knowledge (entrepreneurial discovery), combining science and technology, leading to the potential growth of the market. Government agents do not invest directly in S3 sectors and businesses but promote S3 markets through territorial networks and agreements. This approach represents a shift in the role of the public sector from the traditional managerial government to facilitation.

The importance of the global economy and innovation networks calls for a regional innovation policy that goes beyond regional and national borders. An S3 requires a certain critical mass of resources – economic, academic, social, financial, etc. – and therefore very often requires engaging with other territories to maximise the resource potential. Cooperation in S3 involves sharing knowledge, pursuing collaboration and exploiting synergies with S3 initiatives in other countries and regions. This networking and cooperation approach should cover each step in the value chain from research to commercialisation, and all relevant actors of different sizes and across sectors.

Therefore, research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) form a robust tool to support polycentric development by:

- stimulating networking and cooperation at regional level to reach a critical mass of investment effects/impacts;
- developing a new “regional thinking” that highlights the importance of local context to achieve both efficiency and equity while implementing territorial development policies;

- giving attention to reinforcing competitive advantages of regional specialisation as a key point in mitigating negative effects deriving from globalisation processes;
- stimulating private investment alongside public funding, in a scenario of scarce resources, to support polycentric development.

## Financial approaches and tools

Funding is one of the main challenges for supporting polycentric development. In particular, strategic planning requires adequate financing tools to ensure the practical implementation of the agreed objectives. The main goal is to better match territorial needs with opportunities for funding by means of joint investment initiatives based on collaborative governance arrangements and strategic planning agreements. In other words, it is to support the implementation of place-based initiatives which rely on local knowledge and locally developed strategic frameworks to facilitate endogenous growth within territories.

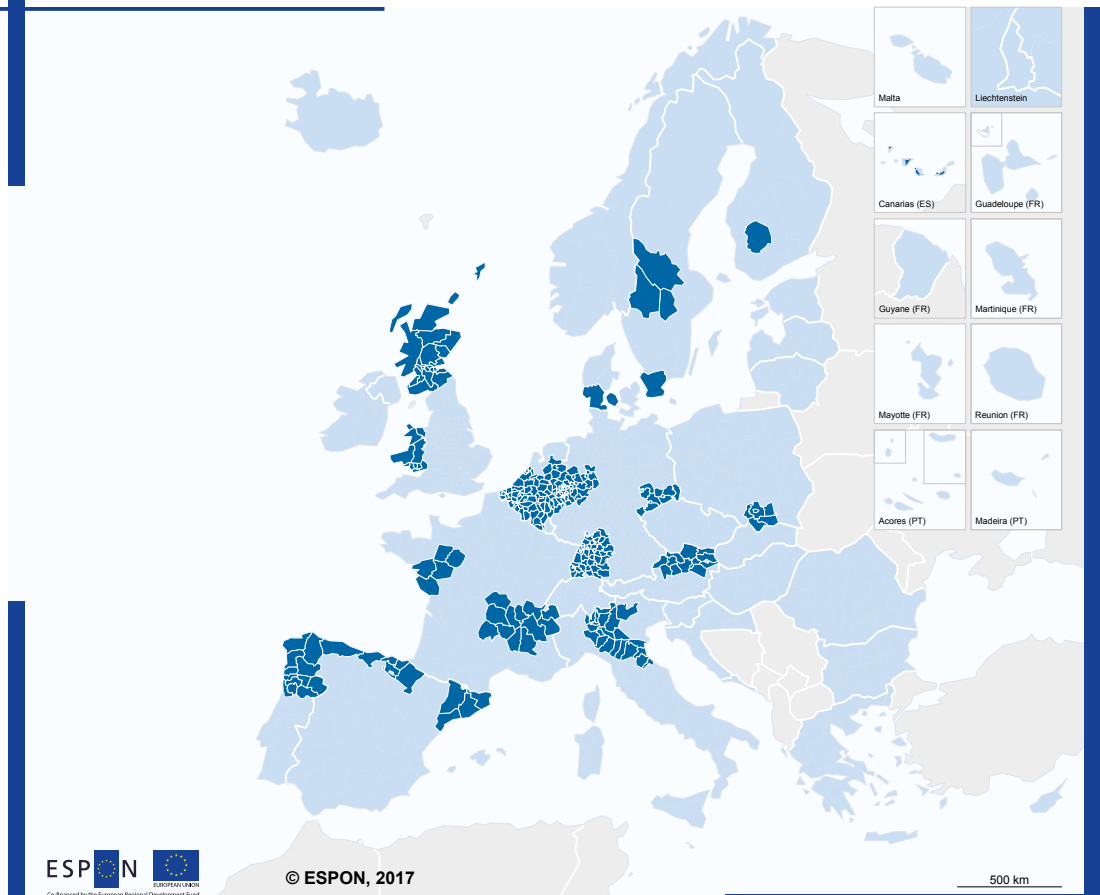
An overview of how territorial investment is being supported in the 2014-2020 period of ESIF shows, with more than 400 initiatives analysed and mapped among the EU State Members in the DG REGIO Study: Integrated Territorial and Urban Strategies. How are ESIF adding value in 2014-2020?, that the overall funding allocation for integrated place-based approaches has increased. Different implementation mechanisms are being used, supported by a range of financial tools. The most common implementation mechanism is a multi-thematic priority axis (PrAxis). Half of the total budget available for Article 7 strategies has been allocated to ITI. The average budget for new financial tools (ITI) is more than three times as large as for mainstream tools (PrAxis). Nevertheless, further improvement of the new financial approaches and tools is required to keep reinforcing cooperation and integration strategies for regional/urban development.

## CASE STUDY

### Smart Specialisation, Vanguard Initiative

- The Vanguard Initiative is developing five pilot projects in different economic sectors.
- It is a non-profit association, with the main goal of contributing to economic development and employment in member regions through inter-regional cooperation and joint investment.
- It seeks to lead the way in supporting clusters and regional eco-systems to focus on smart specialisations in priority areas for transforming and emerging industries, which can take place in developing schemes of inter-regional cooperation and multi-level governance.
- The Vanguard members want to build synergies and complementarities in smart specialisation strategies to boost world-class clusters and cluster networks, through five pilot schemes and large-scale demonstrators.
- Vanguard Initiative asbl Board 2018: Brainport/South Netherlands, South Netherlands, Central Sweden (repr. Region Dalarna), Lombardy Region, Wallonia, Zuid-Holland, Skåne European Office, Emilia-Romagna Region, Provincie Navarra,

### Partners of the Vanguard Initiative



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Regional level: NUTS 3 (2013)  
Source: ESPON EGTC, 2018  
Origin of data: Vanguard Initiative, 2018  
© UMS RIATE for administrative boundaries

**Table 3**  
**Financial tools, strengths and challenges**

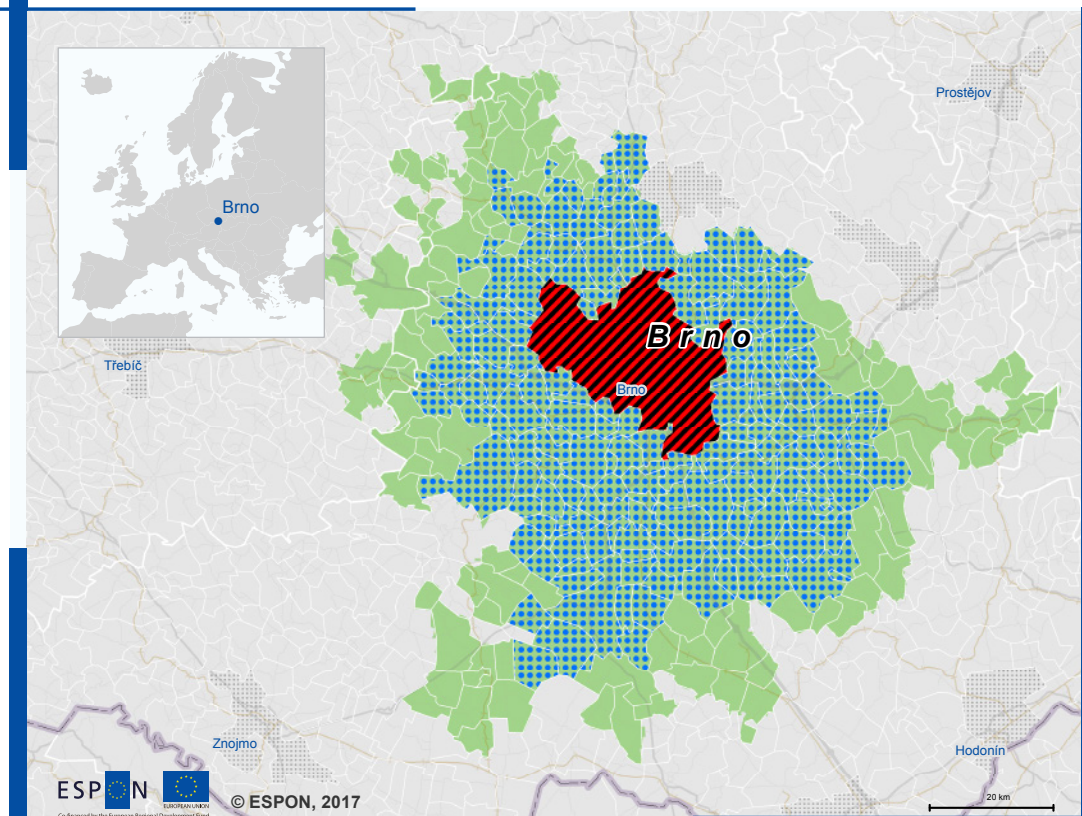
Multi-thematic Priority Axis (PrAxis)	Operational Programmes (OPs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most common implementation mechanism.</li> <li>• The “simplest” option in terms of administrative burden.</li> <li>• Particularly attractive for smaller programmes.</li> <li>• Offers continuity with existing and traditional approaches.</li> <li>• Can be combined with multi-fund OPs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to cover large cities and often based on pre-existing strategies.</li> <li>• Can be combined with PrAxis and ITI multi-funds.</li> </ul>
Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) SUD ITI and non-SUD ITI	Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)
STRENGTHS	
<p>The ability to combine funding from different PrAxis and funds.</p> <p>More flexible and responsive to specific territorial needs.</p> <p>Offers an umbrella where cooperative structures can be organised.</p> <p>Can afford greater visibility to a strategy.</p>	<p>Involvement and support for local development projects.</p> <p>Potential to develop innovative projects.</p> <p>Engages citizens in project decision-making.</p> <p>Fosters greater acceptance of project decisions.</p>
CHALLENGES	
<p>Perceived complexity.</p>	<p>Lack of capacity at the local level.</p> <p>Perceived complexity and increased administrative burden to integrate it in SUD strategies.</p> <p>Lack of relevance due to small scale of funding, with similar instruments already in place.</p> <p>CLLD and ITI integration appears limited.</p>
MULTI -FUND	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The combination of different funds (from multiple ESI funds) under a multi-fund approach enables a more complex set of integrated projects, using ITI, PrAxis or OP approaches.</li> <li>• It is difficult to integrate funds at the project level.</li> <li>• The challenges for multi-fund tools are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– coordination between funds;</li> <li>– limited operational integration (different cultures);</li> <li>– use of separate implementation systems (different monitoring and indicator systems);</li> <li>– different administrative cultures in terms of implementing funds.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The two more general financial instruments are non-repayable loans and a “fund of funds” style of financial programme including debt, mezzanine and equity finance for SMEs.</li> <li>• They tend to be used more often for PrAxis rather than for ITI approaches.</li> <li>• The challenges for financial instruments are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– state aid regulations;</li> <li>– weak business base;</li> <li>– lack of specific expertise within the cooperative structures.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
OTHER FORMS OF FINANCING	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Domestic public funding.</li> <li>• Public-private initiatives.</li> </ul>	











## CASE STUDY

### New financial approach, Brno Metropolitan Area

- There is no permanent governance structure at the metropolitan level.
- In order to formalise the cooperation under ITI, a memorandum on cooperation was signed between Brno City, the south Moravian region and the five largest municipalities in the delineated BMA.
- The overall goal of strategy is to generate cooperation and partnership among cities and municipalities that have shared problems and challenges, and to identify strategic integrated projects eligible for ESIF funding in line with such problems and challenges.
- A key success factor of partners' engagement has been communication with them in the very early stages of the design process.
- ESIF funding is crucial for the success of all these initiatives, since only in one of the initiatives is there a complementary source of funding, from the national budget.
- The strategy has made it possible to create new arrangements within those territories on a systematic basis, with close cooperation and communication between them.

#### Delineation of MUA, FUA & MDA



-  Core city municipality
-  MUA of the core city (ESPON 2013 Database)
-  Surrounding MUA's (ESPON 2013 Database)
-  Metropolitan Development Area
-  FUA of the core city (ESPON 2013 Database)
-  National border
-  Railroad
-  Motorway
-  Primary road
-  Other road

Territorial level: LAU2 (version 2011)  
 Source: Geographical information system of the Commission (GISCO), 2017  
 Origin of data: EUROSTAT, 2011  
 © EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries

## 3. Policy recommendations

The following key messages are presented for four different geographical scales – EU, national, regional and local – derived from the analysis of case studies and best practices of tools and approaches presented in the previous chapter

### EU level

#### Through policy and legislation

Propose policy narrative on the advantages of polycentric development and the role of cooperation among places as a way to achieve more efficiency in the use of public resources, wider geographical impact and more visibility of policy interventions.

Set the use of collaborative governance and planning tools as a precondition for supporting integrated investment initiatives of cities and regions.

Intensify policy coordination at the EU level on the issues related to functional cooperation areas (e.g. metropolitan areas, cross-border areas, transnational areas, city networks, rural-urban linkages) and how these can be addressed by the EU programmes.

#### Through funding

Improve the vertical coordination of different funding sources and programmes to guarantee more coherence of the agendas at different governance and planning levels.

Facilitate horizontal coordination of contributions of different funding sources and programmes towards the implementation of territorially based strategies.

Pay more attention to the territorial impact of the ESIF in order to better match territorial needs with funding opportunities.

#### Through capacity building, territorial evidence and knowledge sharing

Address more robustly the under-researched phenomenon of territorial networking and cooperation and spatial planning; in particular, the impact of sectoral EU legislation and funding instruments in shaping territorial governance and spatial planning at regional, metropolitan and local levels (e.g. environmental, energy, competition and/or maritime affairs legislation).

Provide support and external expertise to national, regional and local authorities for the organisation and implementation of the tools and approaches for supporting polycentric territorial development.

Help the dissemination of good practices and knowledge sharing on the use and benefits of collaborative governance and planning tools to support polycentric development.

### National level

#### Through policy and legislation

Establish an overarching policy framework and guidance to enhance the involvement of regional and local authorities in cooperative governance and planning initiatives at various geographical scales.

Promote the use of various tools and approaches for supporting polycentric territorial development depending on the national context, priorities and long-term development vision.

Combine top-down and bottom-up elements to support decentralisation and associations of regional and local authorities

Ensure the transparency and openness of processes of collaboration among regional and local authorities and, if needed, serving as a neutral mediator to reconcile conflicting interests.

#### Through funding

Allocate financial incentives to support networking, cooperation and linkages among municipalities

Provide funds for territories on condition that the regional and local authorities involved implement governance and planning approaches towards polycentric development.

#### Through capacity building

Provide support and external expertise to national, regional and local authorities for the organisation and implementation of the tools and approaches for supporting polycentric territorial development.

Help the dissemination of good practices and knowledge sharing on the use and benefits of collaborative governance and planning tools to support polycentric development.

## Regional and local levels

Build upon existing traditions of collaboration (e.g. the fields of transportation, waste management and environment protection).

Initiate bottom-up small-scale practices with local actors and allowing cooperation to evolve towards new policy fields (e.g. from public transport to biodiversity or land use).

Develop cooperation structures early in the process of planning. Such structures must have a built-in flexibility to fit the spatial dynamics of the territory and to adjust to changing institutional factors.

Political commitment at regional and local levels is a key issue for evolving from a project-based short-term cooperation towards a (strategic or statutory) planning-based and long-term one.

Understand the benefits that actors can share, by early recognition of interdependencies among relevant actors and creating win-win situations. A process to involve a broad range of actors is crucial to develop joint strategic and spatial planning approaches and to prevent resistance and conflicts.

Well-developed mechanisms to ensure commitment, combining the engagement of leaders in the formal decision-making process with the engagement of administrative coordinators in the planning process and engagement among elected councils at different levels of government.

Understand the territory's spatial dynamics, taking into account not only the territorial and physical dimensions but also the key socioeconomic and environmental impacts of developments beyond the borders of statutory (city) plans.

Change attitudes of planners towards polycentric development by creating a favourable arena for dialogue in order to understand and consider shared interests and the benefits of cooperation. These discussion arenas must be characterised by trust and mutual recognition of the legitimate roles of the actors involved.

Carry out strategic and sectorial planning, to be implemented in statutory planning. Effective interplay between different existing levels of government could be as effective for polycentric development governance as having an additional level of government dedicated to this purpose (e.g. by making strategic plans and statutory plans coherent and interconnected).

Identify implementation tools during the planning process to ensure the achievement of joint strategic objectives (e.g. specific sectorial plans, land use procedures and restrictions, sectoral feasibility assessments of specific developments).

Sharing knowledge also as an important decision-support mechanism for political bodies. Polycentric planning requires interdisciplinary inputs from members of different professions in order to develop an integrated vision on the territory's development.

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