



TA 2030
'SMALL PLACES MATTER'

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SMALL PLACES MATTER

The EU Territorial Agenda 2030 'Small Places Matter' Pilot Action is led by the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation of Norway and includes partners from Germany, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.

The pilot action's work focuses on the vital role of small towns and villages in the development of integrated territorial development processes and in strengthening cooperation between territories. Key to the pilot action is identifying ways to link the valuable insights and momentum that come from bottom-up initiatives and top-down planning processes.

The pilot action directly engages with several priorities set out in the Territorial Agenda 2030, including Balanced Europe and Functional Regions. More specific links are with the aims to: encourage all area types to cooperate on improving conditions, recognise the potential in areas with specific geographies, and support dialogue with decision makers in towns of all sizes to apply an integrated multilevel governance approach. The pilot also addresses relevant concerns in relation to Cross-border Activities, and Green Europe.

Pilot activities included: an initial phase to 'harvest' projects, identifying existing areas of relevant activity, followed by

opportunities to 'showcase' examples and network building activities.

This publication is a result of the pilot action work. The publication focuses on how small places can be, and are, enabled to capitalise on their role and potential. There are numerous policies, initiatives, handbooks, toolkits, guidance, and assessments to inspire and guide stakeholders and policymakers on development in small places. The array of options, opportunities, requirements, and models rely on capacity, engagement, and application by small places. However, small places experience operational and capacity constraints and challenges, limiting their scope to engage and take up opportunities.

This publication identifies examples drawn from pilot action partner experiences which show some practical ways that small places, of all shapes, sizes, and competencies, can be supported/support themselves to boost development and their contribution to the Territorial Agenda's goals of a Just and Green Europe.

Among the key observations are:

- The role of small places in regional economic development is increasingly well recognised in policy, but at a critical juncture with longer-term impacts of global

health, economic and political tensions still uncertain.

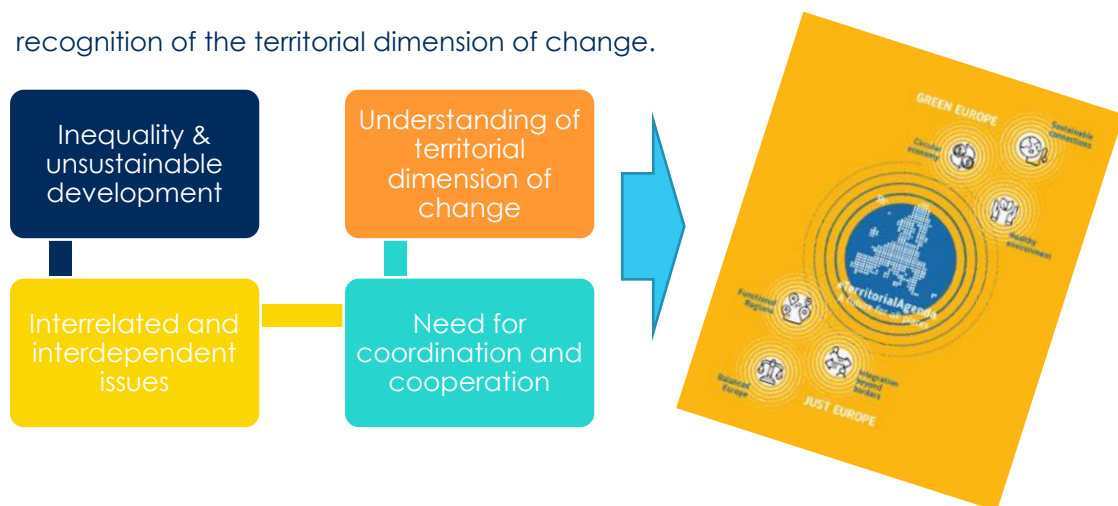
- A territorial, place-based approach is valuable for small places, e.g., by highlighting how action in small places can take on 'big issues' and countering negative perceptions of capacity for action by small places.
- Capacity building is key to help small places inform, work with and benefit from support. Small places need 'first step'-support to engage.
- Territorial cooperation is a significant resource in working to build capacity in small places.
- Practical tools and resources are applied and offer transferable approaches and lessons.
- The Small Places Matter Pilot Action highlights the scope for further exchange on collaboration capacity, and the engagement of young people and retention of populations in small places.

1 SMALL PLACES MATTER AND THE TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2030

Small places matter. In the EU, more than one in three citizens live in towns and cities of between 5,000 and 100,000 inhabitants.¹ Thirty percent of the population lives in rural areas, which are synonymous with smaller towns and villages.² The visibility of 'Small places' in regional and spatial development policy has grown.³ The potential of small places to contribute to more balanced regional development, innovation activities, cooperation, and quality of life is recognised. However, small places are also facing structural challenges linked to decline in key industries, service access, demographic ageing, and depopulation. These dynamics will continue to evolve, influenced further by developments including the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation, climate change and international conflict/pressures.

The numerous and complex development challenges facing European territories are a starting point for the Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA 2030). It sets out two overarching objectives 'Just Europe' and a 'Green Europe.' TA 2030 is a strategic agenda but not limited to the strategic level. It is about engagement and capacity across levels of government and territories, bringing:

- focus on the interrelated and interdependent nature of development concerns issues,
- emphasis on the need for coordination and cooperation, and
- recognition of the territorial dimension of change.



The Territorial Agenda 2030 notes the range of different 'places' across the European space and the diverse development potentials and challenges they face. In relation to small places, the TA 2030 notes: the underexploited potential to cushion the polarisation between Europe's core and periphery; their crucial role in regional economic development and social wellbeing, particularly with national and international accessibility and adequate access to services at local and regional level;⁴ and the scope for cooperation across levels of governance and between small places and with their hinterlands.⁵





Actions to unleash the potential of small places are increasingly prominent in development policies and approaches. Taking a 'territorial approach' and setting these actions within the wider TA 2030 context, adds further value in relation to the following.



- **Strategic territorial focus** - Strategic, spatial lens identifies specific combinations of challenges and potentials that influence the development of different places. Urban areas (sustainable urban mobility, urban fabric, and land use) Rural and remote areas (identifying growth drivers, digital connectivity) Areas with specific geographical endowments (islands) Functional areas (metropolitan areas, urban-rural linkages) Cross-border areas (integrated territorial investment in public services)



- **Policy integration & synergies** - Cross-cutting issues viewed beyond single sectoral or institutional boundaries, allowing more sophisticated responses. Combines support from different sources. Allows synergetic cooperation and exchange between different territories. Cross-sectoral perspectives in the circular economy, integrating public and private sector contributions. Cooperative approach of towns and cities with similar challenges to develop and preserve the multifunctionality of the green spaces.



- **Innovation & experimentation** - New, experimental approaches are often required in addressing territorial challenges and these are often a source of innovative solutions to complex issues. Geo-spatial tools, mapping, Territorial Impact Assessment Experimentation and piloting processes, Territorial networks for innovation



- **Governance models & capacities** - Territorial approaches strengthen governance structures and cultures, boosting capacities particularly at the local level. Vertical, multi-level coordination between national, regional, and local administrations, strengthened horizontal coordination and cooperative dynamics, especially at the local level, Increasing citizen participation in territorial governance.⁶

This publication focuses on how small places can be, and are, enabled to capitalise on their role and potential. There are numerous policies, initiatives, handbooks, toolkits, guidance, and assessments to inspire and guide stakeholders and policy makers on development in small places. However, this array of options, opportunities, requirements, and models rely on capacity, engagement, and application by small places at a time when they face major operational and capacity constraints and challenges.

In this context, this publication takes a 'step back' and recognises the need to help small places find paths and processes to engage and work with the opportunities available. The examples set out are drawn from pilot action partner experiences, so represent a narrow sample, see Table 1. The publication does not set a fixed definition of a small place, as this can vary according to domestic contexts.⁷ The publication also recognises the very different roles, responsibilities and resources that small places have due to differing domestic contexts but does not seek to categorise partner experiences on this basis.

The examples and experiences set out simply aim to show some practical ways in which small places, of all shapes, sizes, and competencies, can be supported, and support themselves, to

boost their own development and contribution to the Territorial Agenda's goals of a Just and Green Europe.

Table 1: Pilot Action Partners

Pilot Partners		Example
Norway	Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development	Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (also with SE) Interreg CBC NO/SE (also with SE) Distriktssenteret
Germany	Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building	Small Town Academy Revitalisation of small town centre/ public participation in planning (Rodewisch)
Ireland	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	Town Centre First Framework
Poland	Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy	Programme for Local Development Intermunicipal cooperation
Sweden	Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure	Municipal Cooperation Region 10
Switzerland	Federal Office for Spatial Development	Role in climate change adaptation and action
EU	DG Regio, DG Agri, ESPON	TA 2030 Data/Analysis

The examples highlight how steps/measures are taken at various levels of governance to focus on and enable small places. Key messages are:



Small Places matter! Action on 'small places' can be embedded and operationalised at all levels of governance and link to TA 2030 objectives.



A territorial approach is valuable for small places, in particular the TA 2030 usefully connects the 'small' and the strategic, e.g., highlighting how action in small places can take on 'big issues' and working to counter negative perceptions of a lack of capacity for action by small places. Related, engagement with and by small places is key as opportunities, options and expectations around stakeholder engagement are extensive.



Capacity building is key to facilitate small places inform, work with and benefit from support. As opportunities to engage in place-based development opportunities increase and greater emphasis is placed on the role of small places in development, capacity to act and engage must be a priority. Solutions will differ from place to place. For some, it is a case of taking the decision to dedicate internal resource. Where resources are tight, solutions may involve external support or shared resources.

- **First Step' capacity building is a priority** - support is available for capacity building in 'small urban areas', e.g., European Urban Initiative, or linked to rural development. However, many small places need 'first step'-support to access this type of support.





Territorial cooperation is a significant resource for small places. Territorial cooperation is a significant resource in working to build capacity in small places.

Collaborative efforts help create enabling environments in which stakeholders can experiment, innovate, and best capitalize on their resources. Thus, cooperation and collaboration between small places is a practical way to build capacity and address issues of joint concern. In a context of scarce resources and complex challenges, territorial cooperation can be viewed as a demanding, 'extra', and resource intensive activity. However, used well cooperation is a means to leverage, enable and support.



Scope to build on existing platforms and initiatives - A new policy 'trend' such as the increased focus on small places is naturally associated with a search for new solutions.

However, recognising what is already in place and building on experience and expertise offers significant value.

The following examples illustrate ways in which these approaches and principles are applied across a variety of types of intervention, levels of governance, and stakeholder types with the aim of maximising the role of small places in their territories.

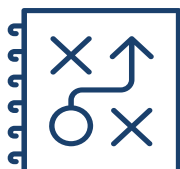


Source: EPRC illustration



2 TOOLS AND APPROACH TO SUPPORT THE ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT OF 'SMALL PLACES'

2.1. Tool # 1: Strategic Profile



A framework of strategic, forward-looking planning is valuable as a resource to capitalise on opportunities, share approaches, build critical mass, and enable effective place-based tailored solutions.

Working with the Territorial Agenda 2030

Key challenge/s: Small places regularly 'fall between the policy gaps', e.g., lying in between rural and urban policy.

Actions: The Territorial Agenda 2030 is a valuable **resource for small places**. **Giving profile to the role of small places**, the TA 2030 notes the variety of small and medium sized towns and cities across Europe; the potential of small places in key growth sectors such as the circular economy; their potential to cushion polarisation; and crucial role in regional economic development and social wellbeing.



<https://territorialagenda.eu/ta2030/aim/>

As well as **highlighting the role of small places**, the TA 2030 sets out **principles on which to base action** around a Just and Greener Europe. It notes the importance of distinct strengths and opportunities and the value of collaboration and joint solutions. As a resource to locate place-specific actions in wider policy contexts, a route to support sharing and disseminating solutions, or a means to initiate specific actions with a small place focus - the TA 2030 is a valuable resource.

Taking forward these principals, TA203 forms the basis of valuable practical, active **links across policy areas**. Already the TA 2030 has facilitated Pilot Actions specifically targeting small places directly (Small Places Matter Pilot Action)⁸, Lagging Regions⁹ and the challenges faced by rural, mountainous, and peripheral areas in addressing Climate Action in Alpine Towns.¹⁰

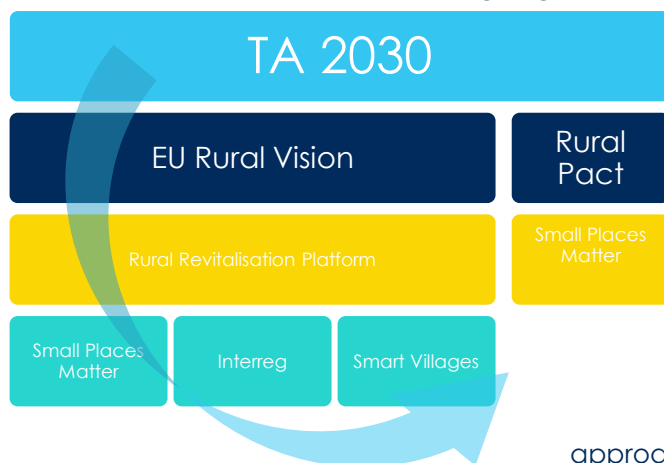
Additionally, complementarity between TA 2030 and the EU's Long-Term Vision for the EUs Rural Area provides a valuable basis highlighting the importance of:

- small cities and towns as driving forces for rural attractiveness and development, and providing access to a number of services for their surrounding rural areas;¹¹



- 'balanced territorial development, anchored in place-based approaches and the involvement of all governance levels, as outlined in the Territorial Agenda of the EU to make the most of the potential of rural areas'.¹²

The Rural Action Plan sets out objectives for a rural revitalisation platform, a one-stop shop for rural communities, rural project holders and local authorities to collaborate. It will support rural areas affected by population loss, ageing and a lack of economic opportunities, by sharing



information and best practices on tools and strategies. As well as promoting LEADER, Smart Villages, Interreg and integrated territorial strategies with a view to making rural areas more attractive and making services accessible, it will link up with the pilot action 'Small Places Matter' under the Territorial Agenda and the 'Smart Rural 21' project to develop smart village approaches.¹³

There are always ways to further improve synergies, however this case is an example of the type of **integrated policy approach** that is key to boosting territorial cohesion and demonstrates how initiatives can come together in support of small places. Similarly, work on EU action to support lonely places covered in a JRC report notes the role of Cohesion policy in supporting tailor-made, bottom-up strategies for fostering sustainable and integrated development, potentially through integrated strategies for non-urban areas.

- ✓ **Policy synergies and integration**
- ✓ **Profile to role of small places in balanced development**
- ✓ **Links to innovative policy initiatives and approaches**
- ✓ **Interrelated and interdependent development concerns**
- ✓ **Promoting coordination and cooperation**

Links:

- Territorial Agenda Pilot Actions: <https://territorialagenda.eu/pilot-actions/>
- Rural Vision https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/long-term-vision-rural-areas_en
- Smart Rural Areas: <https://www.smartrural21.eu/>
- Proietti, P., Sulis, P., Perpiña Castillo, C., Lavallo, C., Aurambout, J.P., Batista E Silva, F., Bosco, C., Fioretti, C., Guzzo, F., Jacobs, C., Kompil, M., Kucas, A., Pertoldi, M., Rainoldi, A., Scipioni, M., Siragusa, A., Tintori, G. and Woolford, J., New perspectives on territorial disparities, Proietti, P., Sulis, P., Perpiña Castillo, C. and Lavallo, C. editor(s), EUR 31025 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-49484-3, doi:10.2760/581071, JRC126033. <https://joint-research->

2.2. Tool # 2: Domestic Strategy Integration



The principle that small places matter and a sensitivity to territorial specificities can be embedded at a high level of policy and link interventions. An integrated approach allows cross-cutting issues to be viewed beyond sectoral or institutional boundaries, facilitates more sophisticated responses, and brings visibility and profile.

Town Centre First: Ireland

Key challenge/s: Challenges to be addressed are depopulation in town centres and increasing populations in hinterlands, the impact of demographic aging particularly in rural and peripheral areas, and self-sustaining settlements to live and work in.

Action: Ireland has an umbrella development framework Ireland 2040, which draws together spatial and national planning and notes the role of small places in overall development. Taking this forward, the Town Centre First Policy focuses on **regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages to contribute to local and national economic recovery**, and to enable people to live and work in a high-quality environment. The policy encourages Government Departments, Local Authorities, businesses, and communities to put **town centres at the heart of decision-making**. For example, through locating key services in town centres, as opposed to on the outskirts of town; to improve footfall and a sense of place; and utilising existing buildings and unused land in town centres for new development boosting functionality, vibrancy, and residential occupancy.

As part of the Town Centre First approach, a commitment is made to provide and resource dedicated Local Authority staff to support town centre renewal, offer seed capital to Local Authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages, to allow individuals and families to build homes in rural centres, use legislation so that empty buildings and shopfronts on main streets can be brought back into compatible use on a short-term, temporary basis, and give powers to Local Authorities to offer commercial rates-based incentives for businesses, targeting the re-use of vacant commercial units.

Although newly launched (March 2021) the approach has the potential to provide a **collaborative, coherent approach** that will boost the development and sustainability of small places and their hinterlands. The commitment is further reinforced by the fact that the country's two EU regional operational programmes for the 2021-27 period both incorporate a



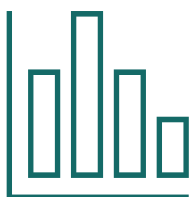
priority 'Supporting Sustainable Urban Development in our Regions' which takes an integrated strategic approach to the regeneration of towns using the Town Centres First Approach.

- ✓ **Policy integration and synergies**
- ✓ **Focus on the role of small town in balanced territorial development**
- ✓ **Resource and capacity to support small place development**
- ✓ **Balanced development and functional regions**
- ✓ **Retaining and building populations in small places**

Links:

- Town Centre First: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/473d3-town-centre-first-policy/>
- Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Ireland, <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-housing-planning-and-local-government-heritage/>

2.3. Tool # 3: Information and analysis



Robust and well-informed actions require a solid information base. Small places are uniquely knowledgeable about their own specific development needs and opportunities. However, comparative analysis and/or engagement with wider development trends is also valuable.

Analysis and information on small towns: ESPON

Key challenge/s: Access to and dissemination of usable, comparative resources to support forward planning and development thinking for, by and with small places can be challenging.

Action: The ESPON 2020 Programme aims at promoting and fostering a European territorial dimension in development and cooperation by providing evidence, knowledge transfer and policy learning to public authorities and other policy actors at all levels. Through this work ESPON recognises the vital role of small villages and towns in integrated territorial development, the potential of all areas to cooperate on improving living conditions, recognises the potential in areas with specific geographies, and supports dialogue with decision makers to apply an integrated multilevel governance approach.

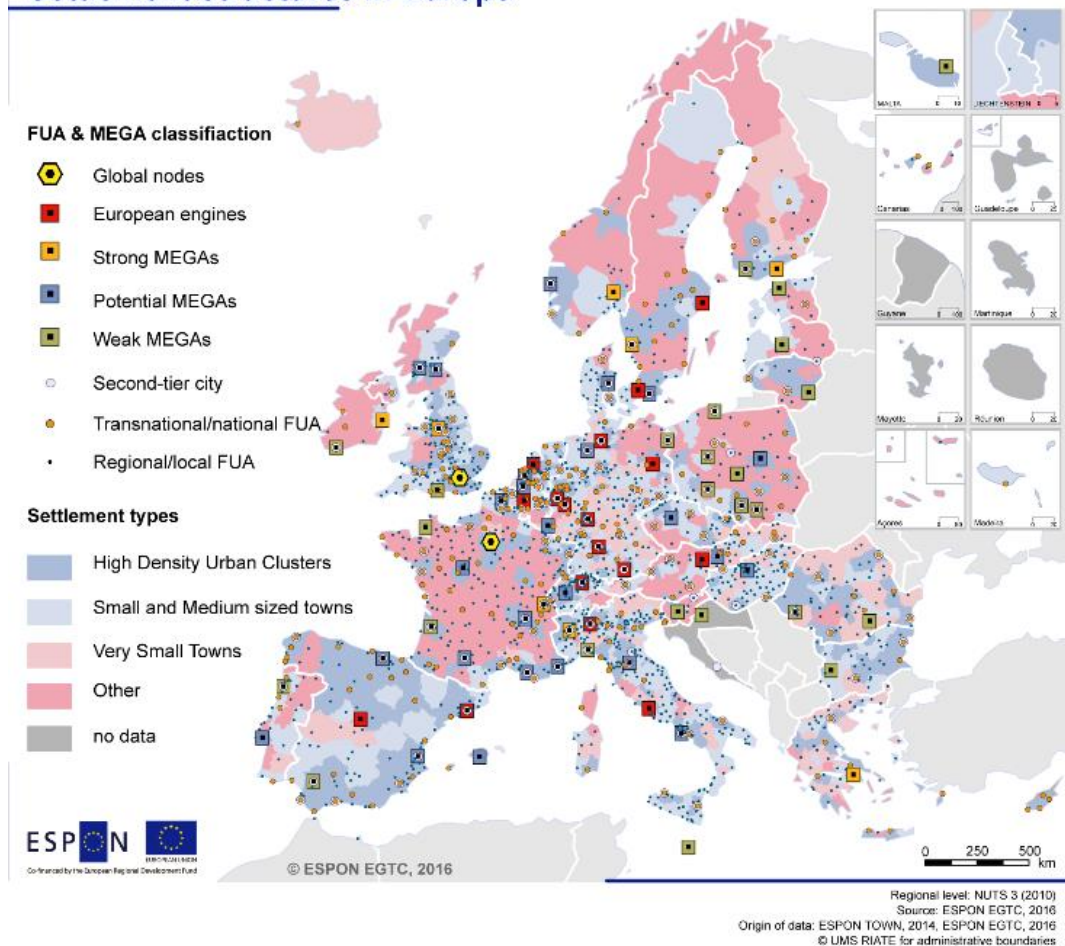


The key role of small places in EU territorial development is reflected in ESPON's work. This work is **a resource for policy makers across levels of government and can help stakeholders in small places highlight their role and position in wider systems and structures**. For example, in March 2023, ESPON set out an intention to undertake a targeted analysis of Innovative planning in shrinking societies proposed by Innlandet County Authority, which responds to the challenges faced by small places and demographic change. Three further examples are set out below:

Urban perspective:

In 2011, the European Commission and OECD adopted a new definition of urban settlements based on population size and density, producing a revised database of 'High Density Urban Clusters'. The ESPON TOWN project has taken a step further and identified lower-order clusters of population - defining Small and Medium-Sized Towns (SMST) as continuous urban clusters with a population above 5,000 and a density above 300 inh/sqkm. The evidence produced showed that almost half of the EU population does not live in a metropolitan/heavily urbanised context, but rather in smaller urban settlements that are strongly embedded in their local environment and surrounding rural areas.

Settlement structures in Europe

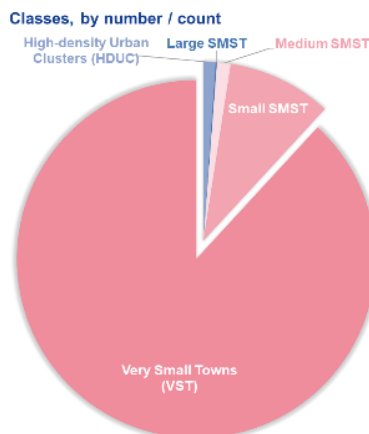
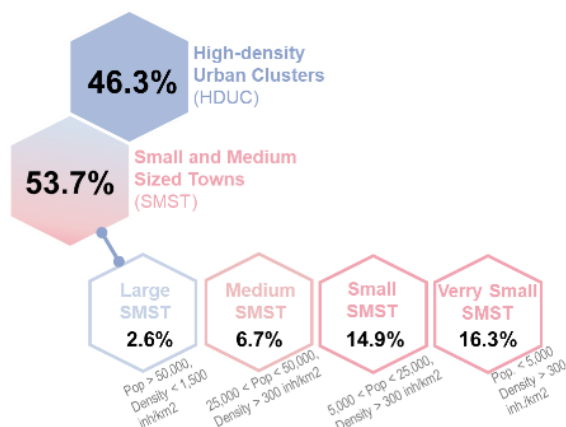


Source: <https://www.espon.eu/topics-policy/publications/policy-briefs/polycentric-territorial-structures-and-territorial>

The analysis of urban settlements (and the subsequent NUTS3-based representation) revealed three main types of national clusters, characterised by different 'degrees of urbanisation'.

- Countries with a prevalence of urbanised population clustered in high-density urban centres: Belgium, Switzerland, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, as well as island states as Malta and Cyprus.
- Countries with a more balanced repartition of population between classes of high-density urban clusters and small and medium towns: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, and Slovenia.
- Countries with an overrepresentation of population living in smaller settlements: France, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, and Slovakia.

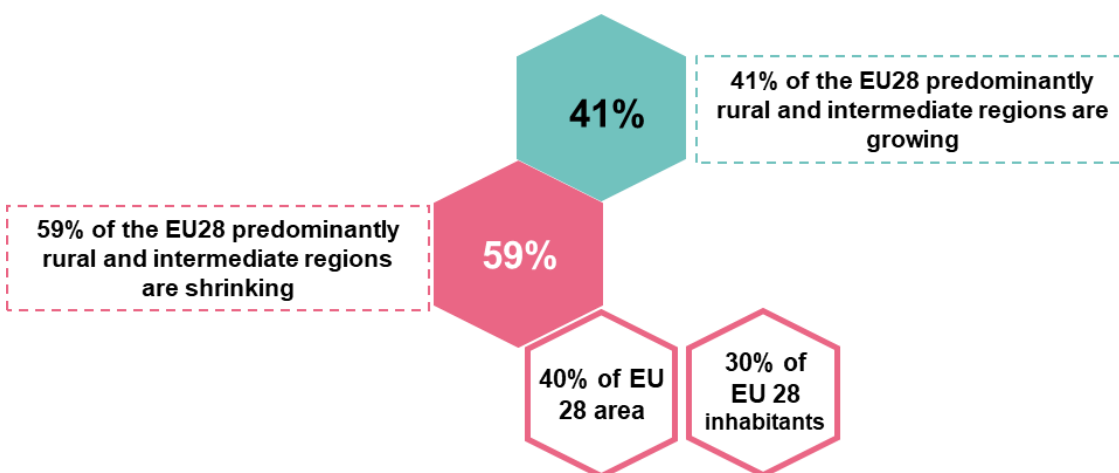
Classes as % of ESPON space*



(Source see [ESPON TOWN project](https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/town-%E2%80%93-small-and-medium-sized-towns) - <https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/town-%E2%80%93-small-and-medium-sized-towns>).

Rural perspective

The ESPON ESCAPE project looked at the demography - a key issue for small towns, particularly in rural areas. When looking at the demographic potential of rural regions, a clear distinction can be made: some regions are/will be 'accumulating/growing', and some are/will be 'depleting/shrinking'. The division, which is based on recent past and projected future demographic trends (over a 20-year period between 1993 and 2033), shows the following.



Source: <https://www.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/ESPON%20ESCAPE%20Main%20Final%20Report.pdf>

Growing regions are distributed in an arch-like shape, which spreads from the west coasts of Norway, southern Finland and southern Sweden via Denmark to the United

Kingdom, southern parts of Ireland, central France, northern Italy, Switzerland, and western Austria.

Shrinking regions, in terms of intensity, are concentrated in areas along the eastern edge of the EU, stretching from eastern Finland, through the Baltic states, the majority of Poland's territory, Slovakia and the Balkan countries, to Greece. The 'belt' of rural shrinkage continues along the Mediterranean through Italy and Sardinia to Spain and Portugal, with some residual shrinking to be found in the Atlantic fringe (Ireland and Scotland).

The demography trends of moving from rural to urban areas, from less developed to developed national regions, from East to West and from Southern Europe to the North have a visible mark on EU society, directly impacting the lives of EU citizens and the local communities with significant effect at national, regional, and local level. (REGI, 2020) As the COVID-19 pandemic brought numerous challenges for the global society, there is an obvious need to step up and change the perspective on rural areas. Thus, it may be useful to recognise that the positive experiences of those who are able to telework while living in the countryside are linked to the quality of life and safety offered by those places. (Extract from ESPON policy brief: [Territorial evidence and policy advice for the prosperous future of rural areas](#))

Socio-economic characteristics of small places

As regards the main characteristics of the local economies of small places, three economic profiles are identified through ESPON TOWN project and that represent the combination of different sectoral specialisations:



productive economy (equivalent to industrial and agriculture activities). This "productive" economy of towns or rural places is the result of the fact that they were part of the late phase of the industrialisation cycle during which they experienced population growth, industrial development, and economic modernization. At the same time, there are several places which based their local economy on the

agriculture sector and derived activities, i.e., agri-food, agri-tourism, etc. The fact that most of these places have retained their productive economic base demonstrates that production of traded goods and services is still important for their development strategy. However, several places have been experiencing delocalisation processes and transformation of their main economic drivers, confirming the fragility of their local economies and the need for support to develop their local economic base.



residential economy (mainly public sector, local retail, and personal services). These places have a local economy that mainly relies on activities and services related to population needs and local demand (housing, public services, etc.). Such a "residential" local economy may be considered as the key driver of socioeconomic

dynamics of towns in various countries (Belgium, France, Germany, The United Kingdom), especially in those regions benefiting from tourist activities (South of Portugal, coastal Catalonia in Spain) and in those in the proximity of urban regions (based on commuting patterns). This might indicate that services to population and residential consumption are still complementary drivers to the general economy where different types of residential activities are present: those where tourism is the major driver in terms of activity and jobs; those with a higher than average proportion of elderly people and where personal services and services related to healthcare have an important role for the local economy; and those located at a short distance from large cities that specialize in attracting commuters and their families ('dormitory' towns or even 'station' towns).



creative and knowledge-related economy (professional services and the creative economy). This last category refers mostly to towns whose local economy is either related to residential or external demand, but at least partly based on knowledge, innovation, and creative activities such as higher education, design-based activities,

etc. This has been achieved by implementing favourable conditions for creative businesses (i.e., subsidies or tax incentives) and by improving the quality of life for the population. These places





were thus able to build on their resources (e.g., quality of place, high level of education, small entrepreneurial milieu) in order to attract new investment and new residents. However, it is important to be cautious as the, often simplistic, advocacy of strategies related to the 'creative economy' frequently fails to consider the complex nature and variety of this sector and the rarity of 'success stories' in terms of developing this sector as a significant part of a local economy.

As summarized below, the three economic profiles (residential, productive, and creative knowledge) can be differentiated along four key dimensions: (i) the groups of actors targeted; (ii) the factors of attractiveness; (iii) the specific drivers; and (iv) the policy tools developed.

	Residential economy	Productive economy	Creative-knowledge economy
Target groups	Residents, commuters and tourists	Business sector	Creative class and innovation firms
Factors of attractiveness	Good living environment, heritage, quality and provision of services, culture, health, real estate market	Competitive business, environment, labour, skills, availability of premises and land	Image, connectivity, creative environment, quality of service provision
Specific drivers	Diversity of equipments and amenities, accessibility	Sectoral specialisation, concentration of business activities	
Policy tools	Improving public and private services, cultural, leisure and touristic infrastructure, investments in transport facilities and green spaces, preserving and capitalising on natural and cultural heritage	Creating / improving the quality of business areas, developing support services to business, lowering professional taxes, subsidies targeting businesses	Developing/ encouraging clusters, networks and creative arenas, creating / attracting higher-education and research institutions, developing incentives for entrepreneurship

(Source see ESPON TOWN project - <https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/town-%E2%80%93-small-and-medium-sized-towns>).

- ✓ **Strategic perspective**
- ✓ **Profile and focus on the role of small towns**
- ✓ **Practical planning/analytical resource**
- ✓ **Understanding the territorial dimensions of change**
- ✓ **Insights into interrelated and interdependent development**

Links:

ESPON - <https://www.espon.eu/>

ESPON ESCAPE: <https://www.espon.eu/escape>

ESPON TOWN Project: <https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/town-%E2%80%93-small-and-medium-sized-towns>



2.4. Tool # 4: Intermunicipal Cooperation



Interventions taken in isolation can be limited in terms of their scope and impact; capacity to act on issues may be constrained. Intermunicipal cooperation offers a valuable way to build critical mass, address challenges, and capitalise on the strengths and opportunities of small places.

Intermunicipal Cooperation: Poland

Key Challenge/s: Poland's Strategy for Responsible Development (2017) identifies challenges facing a **large number of small and medium-sized towns/cities 'losing their socio-economic functions'** and need for additional development support. Challenges relate to suburbanisation, depopulation, lack of jobs, low level of entrepreneurship, insufficient transport infrastructure and insufficient measures of environmental protection. Keys to addressing these challenges are enhancing territorial development and multi-level governance, improving service delivery, and strengthening public management processes in municipalities and counties.¹⁴ However, **insufficient time, financial and human resources, institutionalisation, and awareness are major obstacles to effective co-ordination in municipalities and counties.**

Action: Coordination and collaboration across administrative units to support local strategic planning is the focus of work in Poland. Action taken has its foundations in the following.

- First, the value and importance of local strategic planning, highlighted as vital in the face of increasing imbalance in territorial development across the country.
- Second, the capacity that the development and implementation of a well-designed, financed and evaluated strategy demands.
- Third, the potential of a functional approach to inter-municipal co-operation by providing stronger incentives, greater support for adopting supra-local development strategies and co-operation schemes, and flexible models for metropolitan governance.¹⁵

Addressing these points, **intermunicipal cooperation** is the focus of a project testing a **technical assistance approach to strengthening joint local development planning in marginalized rural municipalities**. Since 2020, The Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, in cooperation with the Association of Polish Cities (APC), has been implementing the project of the Advisory Support Centres (ASC), which included 77 partnerships from 16 voivodeships (regional authorities), 699 municipalities and 61 counties. The project includes assistance in the preparation of territorial strategies that identifies key development interventions and creates integrated strategic projects. The goal of the consultancy is to increase the ability of local governments to identify and prioritize development investments and create well-designed



evidence-based policies based on the socio-economic diagnosis, development barriers and potentials. In addition, through building of the cooperation networks, there is an exchange of knowledge and experience within/across the local and regional governments. Besides the practical dimension of Advisory Support Centres, a key effect of this consultancy will also be strengthening of the role of the territorial approach in the designing and implementation of development policy.

Based on this experience, lessons are drawn at national level on how to structure future technical assistance to the weakest municipalities. Efforts ensure the capacity and institutional development gains from the project remain in place for the local governments involved boosting key areas such as the:

- quality of data used in planning,
- fostering private investment for local development,
- engaging more effectively with citizens,
- strengthening the strategic planning skills and finances; and
- addressing complex and cross-cutting policy problems.

The aim is to support a **functional approach to intermunicipal cooperation incentives**, build greater support for adopting supra-local development strategies and cooperation schemes, and examine flexible models of metropolitan governance. The approach is in line with the Strategy for Responsible Development of Poland (2017) and in National Strategy for Regional Development, which emphasise the role of local government authorities in creating conditions for their own local development, especially through intermunicipal cooperation, and the use of territorial instruments by national government in supporting local development.

- ✓ **Targeted, tailored support**
- ✓ **Focus on functional approach**
- ✓ **Capacity building at local level**
- ✓ **Link to/informing national policy**
- ✓ **Cooperation and coordination**

Links:

- Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (MDFRP), Department of Assistance Programmes, Unit for Municipalities Support; Association of Polish Cities (APC); Institute of Regions and Cities Development.
- https://www.miasta.pl/uploads/attachment/file/4726/OECD_Poland_Local_Report_Highlights_EN_v2.pdf

- https://www.miasta.pl/uploads/attachment/file/4549/Poland_Report__English_.pdf
- https://www.miasta.pl/uploads/attachment/file/4549/Poland_Report__English_.pdf

Cooperation Platforms: Sweden

Key Challenge/s: Sweden outperforms the EU average on core economic indicators and regional economic disparities remain comparatively small. However, there are **notable development disparities between urban and rural/peripheral areas, and this is affecting e.g., equal delivery of services.**

Action: Region 10 is a voluntary association of municipalities in northern Sweden which 'runs joint advocacy work, both regionally, nationally and internationally, to create good conditions for those who live and work in its regions'.¹⁶ Efforts focus on **support small municipalities to act and build capacity** in terms of analytical power, boost ability to take strategic and forward-looking decisions, build capacity to cooperate with others, and take on new knowledge areas at a local level.

Region 10 began in in 2012 and covers ten inland municipalities in Norrbotten and Västerbotten's inland, (Arjeplog, Arvidsjaur, Dorotea, Lycksele, Malå, Norsjö, Sorsele, Storuman, Vilhelmina and Åsele). The area covered is approximately 62,600 km², with a population of approx. 48,138 people. The aim is promoting the role and development of the municipalities in Norrbotten and Västerbotten, as well as nationally and internationally, and the strengthening the municipalities' attractiveness and growth, which leads to increased prosperity and improved living environments for residents, visitors, and employees in the municipalities.



Source: <https://region10.se/region-8/>

Run by a joint board the initiative runs a number of events, joint initiatives, and projects. Work is structured around the activities of cooperation groups including: the board, municipal managers, managers of school, care, business, HR, finance, community building, communicators, and the immigrant network. For 2022, key focus areas are:

- Competence supply
- Funding of basic municipal infrastructure
- Capital supply





- Government service and presence
- Strategic collaboration in impact matters
- Organizational collaboration¹⁷

As opposed to 'competing' the participating municipalities work together to boost the area's image, create equal and equitable living and working conditions and collaborate on effectiveness and efficiency of key services.

- ✓ **Collaborative approach**
- ✓ **Integrated approach, working across sectors and administrative boundaries**
- ✓ **Bottom-up locally driven, place-based**
- ✓ **Balanced development and functional regions**

Links: Ministry of Rural Development and Infrastructure:
<https://www.government.se/government-policy/rural-affairs/>

Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Development:
<https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/inenglish.2908.html>

Region 10: <https://region10.se/region-8/>

2.5. Tool # 5: Cross-border and transnational action



Looking beyond administrative boundaries and working within 'functional areas' opens valuable opportunities for building critical mass to act on a wider range of issues, engage in new fields, access resources and expertise.

Cross-border cooperation in the Scandinavian Mountains: Norway/Sweden

Key Challenge/s: Border regions facing economic, social, and cultural barriers hindering consistent management of resources in the areas. Border regions overlooked in national policy resulting in peripherality within national borders. Taking up new opportunities for territorial cohesion based on common issues and needs and building critical mass and maximising the value of collaboration.

Action: Interreg cross-border cooperation has facilitated territorial collaboration in the Scandinavian Mountains between territories in Norway and Sweden and has been key to boosting the development of small places across the territory.



Both sides of the border suffered from population decline and loss of employment in key sectors. Collaboration on winter tourism offerings and increasingly on green tourism was pursued through successive Interreg projects, which offered a valuable structure, framework, and drive to the collaboration. Collaboration has also initiated further investment, most

notably the development of an airport to serve the cross-border region. Through a series of projects, local businesses, authorities, and institutions are reported to perceive their **connections to municipalities within the cross-border area as closer than those with other municipalities within their own countries.**¹⁸

Experience in this territory adds a dimension to the **concept of a cross-border functional region.** Functional regions are commonly defined through travel distance and commuting patterns, which are valuable in urban and regional planning. However, for more sparsely populated areas with dispersed settlement structures this definition is more challenging to apply. Writing about cooperation, Sæther et al (2019) suggest a broader definition is more applicable and point to the idea of a functional region as a territory characterised by spatially related human activities.¹⁹

The example also illustrates how **cooperation can 'evolve' and build** over extended periods. The cooperation has led to the development of a functional interdependence between partners on either side of the Sweden/Norway Border.²⁰ The Interreg cross border programme is identified as having a key role in amplifying a functional area, collaborative approach, by coordinating support and driving it forward.

Looking to the future and recognising the close cross border linkages between territories, the Interreg VIA Sweden/Norway programme embeds TA 2030 principles and a functional area approach into the new programme for 2021-2027. The program area includes Dalarna, Jämtland-Härjedalen, Värmland, Västernorrland and the Västra Götaland region as well as the Norwegian counties of Innlandet, Trøndelag, and Viken.

- ✓ **Functional approach and place-based**
- ✓ **Collaborative, cross sectoral approaches**
- ✓ **Evolving process drawing on existing programmes and resources**





- ✓ **Integration beyond borders**
- ✓ **Interrelated and interdependent development**

Links:

- Interreg Sweden Norway: <https://www.interreg-sverige-norge.com/>
- Inland County Council, <https://innlandetfylke.no/>
- Site project webpage <https://www.sitedestination.eu/no/>

Northern Periphery and Arctic Interreg B Programme (NPA)

The Northern Periphery and Arctic Interreg B Programme covers a vast geography from the West Coast of Greenland to the Eastern borders of Finland, approximately 2,967,4451 km² and approximately 6.5 million people.²¹ Amplified by extreme environments and geography, extreme peripherality from major economic centres and sparse populations are defining characteristics. Small places and community development have been at the heart of the programme over successive programme periods.



Northern Periphery and
Arctic Programme
2014-2020



EUROPEAN UNION
Investing in your future
European Regional Development Fund



At a project level, NPA projects have worked to connect and build capacity in small places and communities linked to a wide range of issues including demographic change, retaining young population, and community sustainability. For example, the BusK project focused on building capacities for better informed and more inclusive land use planning in public administration in remote municipalities in low density areas. The project's focus on improving public participation in land use planning led to interventions which were found to have benefited the local populations and businesses, in particular the indigenous population. The BusK project experimented with participatory GIS tools. In Västerbotten, the effect of BusK on the capacity of Sami communities to provide documentation of their land use for reindeer herding means that the interests of reindeer herders can be protected vis-à-vis other land uses.²²

As well as delivering practical projects supporting small places on a wide range of themes, the NPA also takes a lead in supporting cooperation across the wider European Arctic through a collaboration initiative with neighbouring cross border and transnational programmes in the region. The Arctic Cooperation network, led by the NPA, has proved to be a fruitful exchange

supported by Interreg programmes in the area. The cooperation facilitates exchange of information, plans and coordinates calls for cluster projects, and runs an Arctic Award scheme. Programme efforts and collaboration between programmes also resulted in project clusters (Arctic and North European Energy Cluster). As with the NPA, the network has a valuable role as an 'interconnector' between the needs of small, isolated places and the major economic, social, environmental shifts taking place across the Arctic region.

- ✓ **Place-based collaboration**
- ✓ **Capacity building and knowhow in communities**
- ✓ **Connecting small places and strategic change**
- ✓ **Collaboration beyond borders**
- ✓ **Interrelated and interdependent development**

Links:

- NPA <https://www.interreg-npa.eu/interreg-npa-2021-2027/>
- BusK project <https://busk.interreg-npa.eu/>
- Arctic Cooperation <https://www.interreg-npa.eu/arctic-cooperation/>

2.6. Tool # 6 Thematic Engagement



The capacity of small places to act and impact on large-scale 'global' issues such as climate change, or green transition can appear limited. However, small places bring a unique perspective, local knowhow, and capacity to mobilise, connect with, and address needs on the ground.



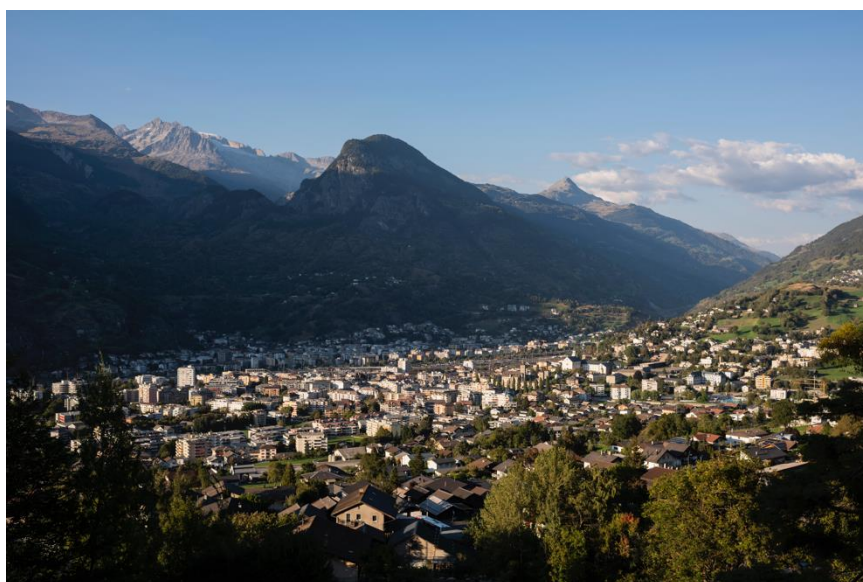
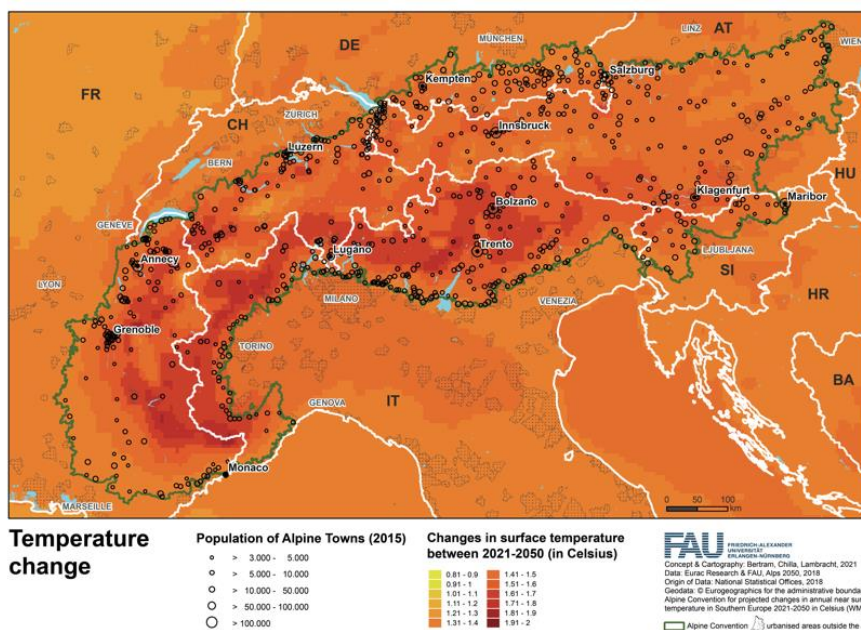


Alpine Pilot Action: Switzerland

Key Challenges: Around one third of Alpine inhabitants live in towns, as opposed to rural areas. As centres of human activity, towns have a key impact on the territory: they are the origin for many challenges such as emissions but also an essential part of their solution.

Action: The TA 2030 'Climate Action in

Alpine Towns' pilot demonstrates how small places can be a vital resource in addressing global issues such as climate change. The project encourages small places to quickly start low-threshold actions, capitalising on local potential and skills. It operates on a multi-level basis linking policymakers and citizens.



Source: Photo of Brig by David Schweizer ©

The goal of the project is simple: try new approaches to climate change adaption or mitigation by tapping into the local potential. Bringing society, civil servants and other stakeholders together introduce new perspectives to ongoing planning processes. The good practice from these 'first steps' shall be

transferred into strategic approaches for the towns. The project framework offered easy access to resources for the local project activities in the towns of Idrija, Tolmin, Villach, Belluno, Trento, Sonthofen, Brig-Glis, Annecy and Chambéry.





The work proves the utility of small-scale, place-based, bottom-up sustainable solutions which can inspire and help build longer-term capacity. It shows that even in the face of overwhelming challenges, local potential in small places can lead to positive change. The pilot was accompanied by a report on Alpine towns which points to some of the current issues as well as providing recommendations for the future through five scenarios. The report addresses a wide range of topics for sustainable development of towns and regions in the Alps.

- ✓ **Innovating through low-threshold actions**
- ✓ **Cooperating on multiple levels and with citizens**
- ✓ **Links to work of Alpine Convention**

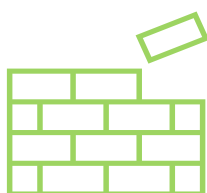
Links:

- **Pilot Action:** <https://www.alpinetowns.org/climate-action-in-alpine-towns/>
- **Alpine Towns Report:** <https://alpinetowns.alpconv.org/>





2.7. Tool # 7 Local capacity building



Effective and efficient strategic planning and delivery requires substantial expertise, capacity, and resources. Small places face particular challenges in accessing and securing such resources, especially in a context of budget cuts and major external shifts and pressures, e.g., Covid and refugee responses. Support to boost local capacity for strategic planning and engagement is vital.

Competence Centre: Norway

Key Interests: Norway has 356 municipalities with responsibility for delivering key services, primary education, outpatient health services, services for the elderly unemployment and social services, economic development activities and municipal roads. Development challenges such as demographic concerns (low population density, migration, and aging) and physical connectivity are longstanding issues.

Cases/Example: Distriktssenteret is a national competence centre that works with both the municipalities and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The aim is to **strengthen municipalities and regions' ability to develop attractive and fast-growing local communities.**²³



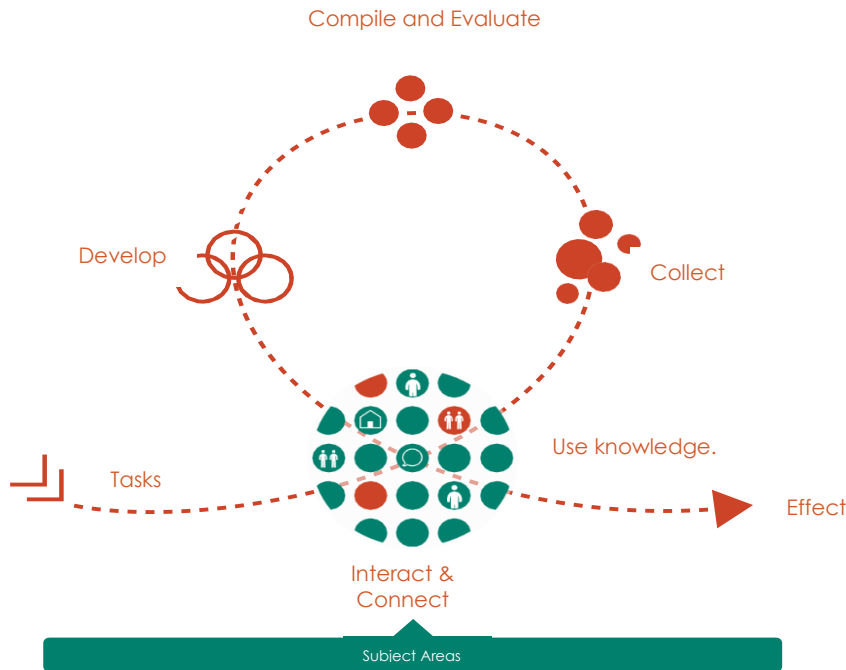
Source: Distriktssenteret

A key feature of the Distriktssenteret is its close focus on the specific needs of its core clients - small municipalities and county administrations. Results are:

- highly **tailored, targeted solutions and support addressing specific needs on the ground,**
- connections for small places to innovative and novel approaches drawn from the Distriktssenteret's wide experience and expertise; and
- a strong two-way relationship with their core clients which informs future work and support.

Although beyond the direct remit of the Distriktssenteret, capacity building support for place-specific interventions can also build interest and capacity for wider cross-border or transnational exchanges.





Source: Distriktssenteret

The Centre works through a number of projects and approaches including the following:

- **District municipality 3.0** – Barriers were identified, such as negative perceptions of capacity for local action, planning requirements ill adapted to small places, lack of contact with county-level and lack of resource. The projects focussed on renewal of working methods, better connection between planning and development, and simplification of community planning in the smallest municipalities. In particular, co-creation methods were used with municipalities, county municipality and governor, relevant government Ministry.
- **Gnist** - Innovation programme for place and economic development which responded to Norway's National roadmap for smart and sustainable cities and local communities. The work is based on the recognition that rural municipalities want and see the need to develop new methods and solutions for spatial and business development. The aim is to act as a spark (Gnist) that triggers new initiatives, initiates processes and drives local development forward. More specifically, it aims to strengthen expertise, test mobilizing methods for stakeholder involvement, and develop experience with implementing innovative public procurement processes. In particular the project draws upon design thinking using a non-linear, iterative process that teams use to understand users, challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions to prototype and test.
 - Examples include Lom Innlandet – model for future-oriented housing development, Sortland Nordland a public-private partnership for rural centre development, Songdal, Luster Aurland Vestland innovative tourism development based on needs of local residents, Skjervøy Troms & Finnmark brand development and meeting places in small communities.
- **The Guidance Pilot** – A collaborative project that aims to strengthen the municipality as a community developer. This includes work with municipalities to develop tools to strengthen their own competence and capacity in community development and cooperation across levels of government, in particular municipalities and counties.





Participating municipalities select a theme which can range from planning work to adaptation to an aging population, and the Distriktssenteret and relevant counties can contribute with guidance, specialist/technical input, and support in process planning. A key element of all the work is ensuring broad and extensive citizen engagement.

- Participating municipalities are amongst the most peripheral in the country, from 800 to 4000 in habitants, 80% speak Sami. There is extremely low population density, and average population decline of 6.5% since 2015. Support led to high levels of engagement, for example, Karasjok Municipality, with 2500 inhabitants, had a 60% response rate to citizens survey feeding into community plan development, held facilitated public meetings and undertook a business survey. As well as providing technical support, a key input was help to 'ask the right questions' and clarify thinking, as one participant states '*We have a sparring partner that challenges us to clarify problems*'. Also noted were lessons from municipalities where engagement was more challenging/difficult to sustain due to staff turnover.

Key lessons gained are that rural municipalities benefit from expert knowledge and especially process planning support and guidance. Support teams must be tailored to match both the professional and process expertise needed. The guidance pilot has been a valuable arena for testing methods and tools aimed at development in rural municipalities; and mayors and municipal directors' commitment is decisive for success.

- ✓ **Build on experience and research on local development**
- ✓ **Community sustainability**
- ✓ **Tailored responses to specific area's needs**
- ✓ **Co-creation of services and support**

Links:

- **Distriktssenteret** - <https://distriktssenteret.no/>
- **Ministry for Local Government and Regional Development** - <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/kdd/min/id509/>

Advisory Support: Poland

Key Interests: Large number of medium-sized towns/cities 'losing their socio-economic functions' and need of additional development support. Challenges relate to depopulation, low-level of entrepreneurship, lack of jobs, suburbanisation, insufficient transport infrastructure and insufficient environmental protection.

Cases/Example: Linked to Poland's Programme for Local Development (operated by the Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy), a competitive process was launched in which 29 eligible towns are selected for a €3,5 million grant. Participating towns in the competition benefit from advisory support from the Association of Polish Cities (APC), Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities, and by the OECD. Successful towns

have 2.5 years to implement environmental, social, entrepreneurship projects linked to their overall development plan, as well as initiate long-term work on the city development and improving institutional capacity. Work on institutional capacity building links to a 2-year OECD project on “*Better governance, management and implementation of public services in local self-government units*” and a related series of workshops to promote:

- strategic planning;
- co-ordination across administrative units and policy sectors;
- multi-level governance and investment capacity;
- the use of monitoring and evaluation evidence for decision making;
- budgeting;
- strategic workforce management;
- open government; and
- regulatory policy to reduce administrative burden and simplify public procurement.

In addition, study visits funded through the Norway Grants Scheme enable exchange of experience and inspirational stimulation for the development processes and practices that the 29 cities will pursue.

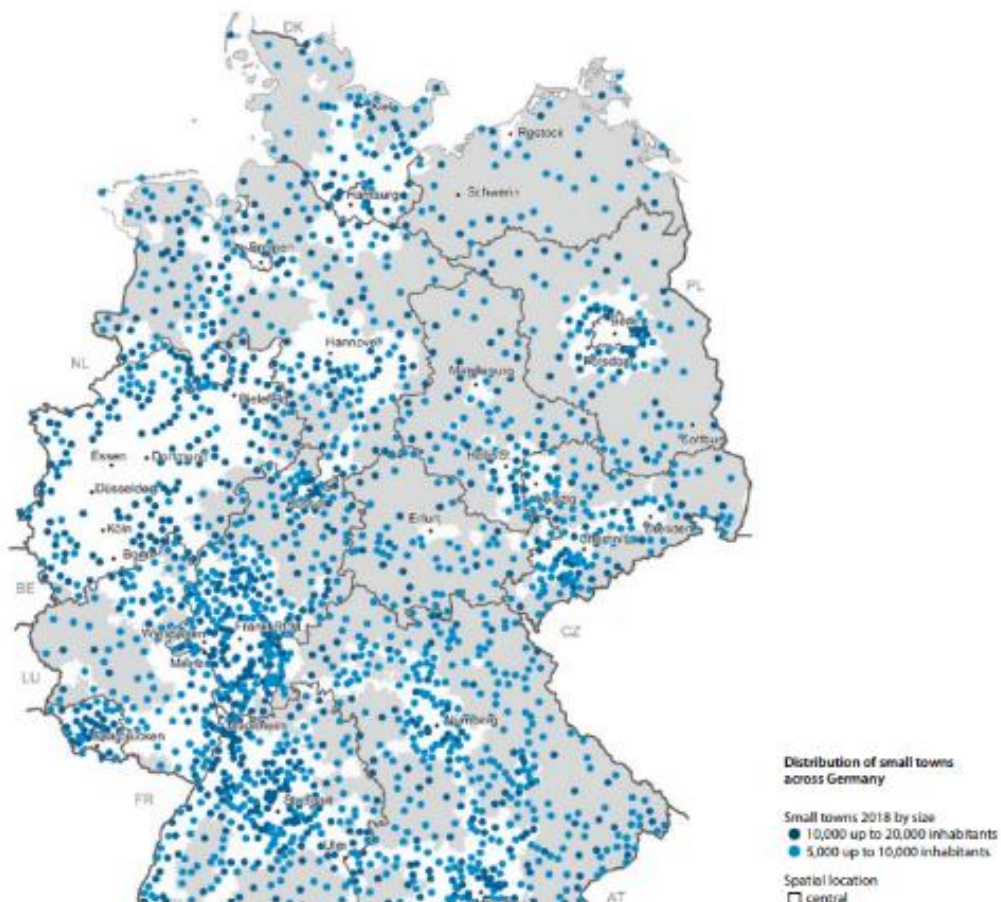
- ✓ **Practical, targeted support**
- ✓ **Transnational collaboration and exchange of experience**
- ✓ **Long-term strategic planning**
- ✓ **Balanced development**
- ✓ **Value of cooperation**
- ✓ **Linking interventions, e.g., Norway Grants Scheme, OECD**

Links:

- <https://www.eog.gov.pl/en/site/learn-more-about-the-grants/learn-more-about-local-development-programme/>
- Association of Polish Cities (APC): <https://www.miasta.pl/en>; <https://www.miasta.pl/>
- OECD Report (eng. version) on Polish Local Self-government Units on the APC website: <https://www.miasta.pl/aktualnosci/jest-juz-raport-oecd-o-stanie-samorzadu-lokalnego-w-polsce>
- **Lead stakeholder:** Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy (MDFRP), Department of Assistance Programmes, Unit for Municipalities Support; and Association of Polish Cities (APC); Institute of Regions and Cities Development.

Small Town Academy: Germany

Key Challenge/s: Almost a third of the population live and work in small places in Germany.²⁴ While small towns in peripheral locations often face decline, the high quality of life in many towns, particularly linked to opportunities for working from home and as locations for SMEs provides opportunities. The need to provide support to enable small places to capitalise on their opportunities and potentials led to the development of a Small Town Academy.



Source: Spatial Monitoring System of the BBSR Geometry: municipal conglomerations (generalised borders), 31.12.2018 © GeoBasisDE/BKG Author: A. Milbert

Action: The Small Town Academy initiative is built around the principal of 'urban development by, with and for small towns'. The aim is to support small towns to articulate, develop and find common solutions for their concerns and needs.²⁵ Small towns should not be merely reacting to funding calls and programmes but should have the opportunity to put forward and drive their own ideas and concerns.

To capitalise on this potential and respond to new opportunities, a need for tailored support was identified, in particular support for active planning and implementation. The Small Town

Academy responds to this need and combines a wide range of exchange, consulting and networking opportunities that generate innovation in and knowledge of urban development in small towns and allow municipalities to identify and exploit their potentials and raising the profile of small towns in national and European planning.

A pilot phase ran between 2019 and 2022, and participating towns had an instrumental role in shaping the structure format and approaches. The pilot highlights the diversity of small towns and the, associated, varying needs/solutions linked to staff/ resource constraints etc. Activities concentrated on supporting direct exchange among all participants, for example in projects in small-town development or in the form of mayor tandems, but also in numerous event formats, from temporary workshops to regional and national conferences. Virtual libraries, digital-learning formats and exhibitions took place.²⁶ The approach is based around three principles: include everybody, work together and develop gradually. Activities included project calls and model projects (e.g., on tourism, governance, climate justice, digital transformation), creation of publications and reports, events, development of organisational model, establishment of advisory board and secretariat and virtual library resource.



The Small Town Academy will continue to act as a learning organisation, being flexible and responsive to different and changing needs. Different capacities and resources on the ground can be considered using a mix of centrally, regionally, and locally delivered analogue and digital resources, including projects, workshops, conferences, online resources etc.

- ✓ **Capacity building and engagement**
- ✓ **Tailored, collaborative approach working with diversity of small towns**
- ✓ **Capitalising on opportunities and strengths in small towns**
- ✓ **Need for coordination and cooperation**

Links:

- German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) supported by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial





Development

(BBSR)

<https://www.bmwsb.bund.de/Webs/BMWSB/DE/startseite/startseite-node.html>;

https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/home/_node.html

- "Small Town Academy", run by BMWSB/BBSR - https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/publications/SpecialPublication/2021/german-small-town-academy-pilot-phase-dl.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2

2.8. Tool # 8 Local engagement



Citizen engagement is the key element of development planning and the sustainable evolution of small places. Social media and on-line technology offer new ways to engage with people and generate ideas and input.

Key Interests: Address challenges and solutions for small towns (5.000 - 20.000 inhabitants). Specific topics of interest are participation processes, being attractive for young families and inhabitants, sustaining basic services of general interest (health, education), and digital tools.

Action: The city of Rodewisch in Southwest Saxony in Germany has been supported by a national research programme "Demonstration Projects of Spatial Planning" (MORO). The town has already been the focus of work on "Potentials of Small Towns in Peripheral Locations", working with the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development since 2015. The project supported a process for the future development of the city based on a **broad citizen participation process**. This involved innovative approaches to engage citizens and stakeholders to enable them to exchange and develop ideas and draw on their potential and insights. The aim was to develop positive visions for the future using a variety of methods, including mind mapping, storytelling, 'future headlines', youth bar camps, scenario building, using creative techniques which facilitated opening up new thinking and ideas.²⁷ Thus, to shape the process of change in the town, the focus is on identifying and using local potential.

Work in the town has focussed on the revitalisation of the town centre, with particular reference to children, young people and families, e.g., through upgrading the infrastructure, public spaces, playgrounds etc, participation processes with children on public spaces around the new kindergarten, establishment of a pop-up store, to revitalise retail sector in Rodewisch, potential for public participation.

Identified factors of success for the processes of cooperative small-town planning were summarised as: **(1) support from local politics, (2) good external mentoring, (3) participation and information with appropriate instruments, (4) motivation and engagement of all players in the process, (5) financial and human resources to secure the main process, (6) realisation of**

the project as a sign of a successful process, (7) experience exchange and corporate learning.²⁸

Cooperative small-town planning does not replace formal methods of planning, but something that can be worked out parallel to or following the scenario process in the pilot projects to strategically pool the results (fields of action, leader projects, starter projects being implemented in the short-term) and operationalise them for their following implementation. It was also clear that small towns with their limited financial and human resources need more attention, support, and mentoring.

- ✓ **Focus on quality of life, well linked, local community connections, education and economy based, creative places and people, tourism, digitalisation as part of new solutions, cooperation important**
- ✓ **Engagement with young people**
- ✓ **Cooperative planning and building structures and spaces for people to exchange and communicate**
- ✓ **Place based approach**

Links:

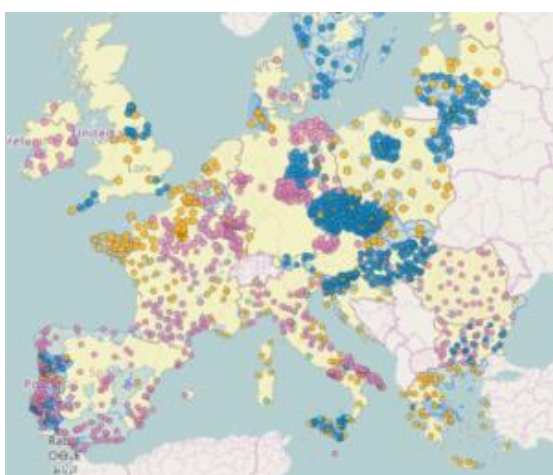
- Rodewisch <https://www.rodewisch.de/seite/66246/stadtentwicklung.html>
- <https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/research/programs/moro/studies/implementation-territorial-agenda-2030/01-start.html?pos=4>
- **Lead stakeholder:** German Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building (BMWSB) supported by the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR)



2.9. Tool # 9: Engage with integrated territorial development tools



Examples of cross border and intermunicipal cooperation illustrate the opportunities for integrated territorial development. In the EU context, a number of tools exist to facilitate integrated territorial development. How they address the needs of small places could be explored further.



<https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/>

Integrated territorial tools, Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies (ISUD) and ITIs (Integrated Territorial Investments), are increasingly widely used.²⁹ ISUD can be implemented through 'mainstream' approaches (in a similar way to how other European Structural and Investment Funds are implemented) as either a separate Operational Programme or a separate mixed priority axis.³⁰ ISUD can also be implemented through an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), which were introduced under Article 36 of the CPR, are proposed as a means to deliver CP in a territorially integrated

way in order to increase its effectiveness.³¹

Funding planned for territorial and urban strategies amounts to approximately EUR 30 billion, around 10 percent of the total Cohesion Policy budget.³² Although widely associated with larger urban areas, small and medium sized towns have key role to play.³³ The 2020 JRC handbook on Sustainable Urban Development stresses breaking down the 'traditional urban-rural dichotomy', and the value of promoting cooperation across functional areas and between municipalities to, e.g., exploit synergies as levers for development and multi-level governance, engaging the local level. Key aspects of the ITI approach resonate with the development needs of small places. For instance, the scope to combine funding to enable specific territorial needs to be better reflected, e.g., combining ERDF and rural development funds, or geographic flexibility taking account of interlinkages between small places and larger centres, rural hinterlands, or groupings of towns with shared development concerns. ITI are most widely associated with urban areas, but in practice, can be any geographical area (urban, urban-rural, sub-regional, or inter-regional). Similarly, CLLD (Community-led Local Development), which is carried out through multisectoral area-based local development strategies led by local action groups, can also contribute to territorial development in small places.

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre Handbook on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies notes that out of the one hundred strategies that have indicated urban-rural linkages as a priority topic, 76% have a city/town scope, 21% focus on functional areas and 41% of the strategies cover an area with less than 50,000 inhabitants. This data underlines the relevance of the issue to small places and shows that SUD can be an effective instrument for overcoming barriers between urban, regional and rural policy.³⁴ To succeed these initiatives need local-level buy-in and capacity, particularly as complexity is a challenge in relation to the governance of the strategies.³⁵ Examples, highlighted in the Handbook and drawing on wider research include the following. In Austria, strategies target functional territories formed by conurbations or networks of small towns with a population of few thousand inhabitants. By pooling resources and establishing inter-municipal cooperation small places gain critical mass and address urban-rural linkages. Another example is the Sustainable Urban Development strategy in north of the Extremadura region of Spain. The strategy called 'Plasencia y Entorno' includes thirteen villages around Plasencia together with the main town, covering a total population of 53,000 inhabitants. Projects address economic development by means of non-material actions for social innovation, social services, employment, and training to improve the education and skill base in rural areas.³⁶

The work by the JRC is followed up by a further publication, Sustainable Urban Development in Small Urban Areas.³⁷ The potentials to transform the way Small Urban Areas build multi-stakeholder, multi-level and cross-departmental structures to better address local challenges are highlighted. The value of tailored support to boost the capacity of small places to develop more ambitious and integrated strategies in the future is also emphasised.

- ✓ **New approaches to support territorially integrated actions**
- ✓ **Increasing awareness of the role of 'small places' in urban, rural, and integrated development, e.g., through hinterlands, networks of municipalities.**
- ✓ **Enabling a territorial focus and application of functional areas**
- ✓ **Connecting interventions**

Links:

- Fioretti, C., Pertoldi, M., Busti, M. and Van Heerden, S. (eds), Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies, EUR 29990 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-13673-6, doi:10.2760/32842, JRC118841 <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/full-report#the-chapter>
- Fioretti, C., Saraceno, P., Perpiña Castillo, C. and Testori, G., Policy Atlas of Sustainable Urban Development for Small Urban Areas, EUR 31440 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, ISBN 978-92-68-00404-3, doi:10.2760/384841, JRC132926.



- Van der Zwet, A., Bachtler, J., Ferry, M., McMaster, I., Miller, S., Integrated territorial, and urban strategies: how are ESIF adding value in 2014- 2020? Brussels, 2017. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/01fce46b-e6d6-11e7-9749-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-105076479>
- **Lead stakeholder:** DG Regio, Joint Research Centre, European Commission, JRC, European Policies Research Centre (EPRC)

2.10. Tool # 10 New Perspectives on Existing Resources



The role of small places in development is the subject of increased policy attention and the TA 2030 shines an additional light on the issue. New solutions and responses are critical. However, value can also be found in existing approaches and past projects, particularly in relation to quality of life and addressing youth outmigration.

Innovation Circle Network and cooperation on youth out migration from small place: Norway

Key issue: Youth out migration and demographic ageing are key challenges facing small places. As well as looking to new solutions, it is also valuable to **recognise and 'harvest' from the past expertise and experience** accumulated through a variety of community and collaborative projects.

Action/s: As part of Norway's involvement in the Small Places Matter Pilot Action a retrospective review of past Interreg projects was undertaken. The review highlighted work initiated through Interreg cooperation programmes which have led to self-sustaining action targeting community development particularly in remote and rural areas and a strong focus on links to education.

The Innovation Circle Network links active local and regional authorities, institutions, NGO's, and private organizations working on regional and local community development. The cooperation has its origins in the 2004-2005 Interreg Pipe Project supporting young people working internationally and learning about planning, identity, participation, and entrepreneurship. The Lead partner of the initial project was Østfold County Council in Norway. The work went on to involve training on territorial development strategies, designing attractive towns and places, with a specific focus on young people. The common strand in the PIPE project was the engagement with young people. Key messages from the project were:

- in small towns and peripheral regions neither the market nor traditional local and regional government practice is going to be able to stem de-population and loss of cultural identity and natural heritage;

- new institutions and attitudes are required – a social entrepreneurship, which is cross-sectoral, innovative, understands business, but also serves, develops, and is inspired by local communities and place identity; and
- young people can be the catalyst to demonstrate and deliver this change, and schools can be forces for economic development.

The projects contributed to the development of sustainable settlement structures by stimulating entrepreneurial and community spirit inside participating regions. In particular, the project demonstrated, how the visions and engagement of young people were a valuable resource in spatial planning and community development. A subsequent, related, project Trans in Form included LP Notodden Municipality, Norway – also Telemark County + Municipalities in Östfold involved. Activity focussed on the need for rural regions, smaller towns and cities can become attractive for workers, for young families and investments through using better planning tools, new development strategies and joint community projects. The project “Trans in Form” aimed to introduce competitive development concepts for rural regions and smaller towns and cities to raise awareness among both policy makers and citizens about regional attractiveness and potential.

Working in a related field, PADIMA (Policies Against Depopulation in Mountain Areas) – Interreg IVC 2007 – 2013 focussed on exchange of best practice in fighting depopulation in mountain areas, which are dominated by small places. Key structural, inter-related elements of a policy against depopulation were highlighted:

- Education and training: the offer of education and training must be coherent with current and future needs of the local economy and provide young people and adults with the skills development programmes they need;
- Territorial marketing: Attractiveness depends on the capacity of these areas to restore their inhabitants' pride and to renew their image;
- Economic diversification: some mountain economies tend to be highly dependent on traditional sectors (agriculture, winter sports, etc). Diversification of available jobs and securing the transmission of existing businesses to younger generations is essential to remain attractive to working age population.

Crucially, the project approached demographic change as not a problem ‘only’ for mountain regions, but one linking back to wider policy approaches and the lack of quality infrastructure and public services in such areas.

- ✓ **Territorial dimensions of change**
- ✓ **Addressing demographic change and retaining young people in area**
- ✓ **Interrelated and interdependent issues**
- ✓ **Opportunity for coordination and cooperation**
- ✓ **Connecting interventions**



Links:

[https://www.innovationcircle.no/ /](https://www.innovationcircle.no/)

<https://keep.eu/projects/477/Policies-Against-Depopulation-EN/>

3 OBSERVATIONS

- **Small Places do matter!**



- While definitions and specific contexts are important, the broad concept of 'Small Places' is relatable and connects practice and experience.

- The role of small places in regional economic development is increasingly well recognised in policy, but at a critical juncture with the longer-term impacts of global health, economic and political tensions still uncertain.

- **A territorial, place-based approach is valuable for small places**



- A territorial, place-based approach is valuable for small places. TA 2030 usefully connects the 'small' and the strategic. A territorially based, cooperation-led approach can pull scarce resources and capacity, avoiding small places from being isolated actors. Work to emphasise, reinforce and operationalise this link should continue, e.g., highlighting how action in small places can take on 'big issues' and working to counter negative perceptions of capacity for action by small places

- Action on 'Small Places' can be embedded and operationalised at all levels of governance and link to TA 2030 objectives.

- **Capacity building is key**



- Small places face complex multi-sectoral territorial development issues, which are subject to rapid and sudden change. These challenges are increasingly well recognised and are the focus of numerous policy initiatives. To maximise effectiveness and efficiency of these interventions, capacity building is key to help small places inform, work with, and benefit from, support. For example,

- Planning requirements can be better adapted to small places
- Build in a capacity component/resource into policy planning and implementation, e.g., Town Centre First, work by Distriktssenteret
- Boost capacity in key areas such as citizen engagement, use of 'big data', and analysis of complex cross-cutting policy areas.

- **'First Step' capacity building a priority**



- Support is available for capacity building in 'small urban areas', e.g., European Urban Initiative, or linked to rural development. However, to access this type of support, many small places need 'first step'-support to engage, e.g.

- Local, grassroots, direct support and engagement that responds to territorial needs and specificities.
- Support to take a 'step up' to national/EU initiatives.
- Small places are part of wider territorial systems. Bottom-up engagement, place-based action, and direct engagement by small places is vital. However,
 - Frameworks, support, and resources to facilitate these processes can usefully be delivered nationally, regionally, and collaboratively, e.g., Small Town Academy, support for intermunicipal cooperation and knowledge 'hub' for small towns.

- Territorial cooperation has an important role



- Cooperation, e.g., cross-border, interregional, intermunicipal, is a significant resource in working to build capacity in small places. Collaborative efforts create enabling environments in which stakeholders can experiment, innovate, and best capitalize on their resources. Thus, cooperation and collaboration between small places is a practical way to build capacity and address issues of joint concern. In a context of scarce resources and complex challenges, cooperation is can be viewed negatively, as an 'extra' resource intensive activity. However, used well it is a means to leverage, enable and support:
 - National/regional government support, e.g., encouraging initiatives such as Region 10.
 - Interreg programmes and projects, local and municipal authorities have a strong role in Interreg which can be advanced.
 - ITIs/CLLD could be even more open to small places.

- Build on existing platforms and initiatives and link to future initiatives



- . A new policy 'trend' is naturally associated with a search for new solutions. However, there is huge potential in recognising what is already in place and 'harvesting'/building on past experience and expertise.
 - A number of smaller 'first step' capacity building initiatives are in place, operating independently and suppling tailored place-based support. Distinct approaches, tailored solutions and a strong focus on local needs is important, but there is also scope for exchange of experience and best practice.
 - More generally, as a number of these examples highlight, opportunity exists for synergies and links between interventions, e.g., Norway Grants Scheme and OECD collaboration boosting capacity in small towns in Poland, which links on to future capacity to participate in ITI and Cohesion policy, and tailored Distriktssenteret support which could boost capacity of participation in collaborative Interreg.

- Tools and resources





Looking across the examples, practical tools and resources are applied:

- **Strategy:** TA 2030 is a valuable enabler/lever to justify/support action, bridge sectoral silos and levels of governance and connect territories. The EU's Rural Vision and domestic policy commitments can fulfil a similar role.
- **Data and insight:** Robust interventions require both solid comparative information and analysis (e.g., ESPON) and tailored place specific insights (e.g., citizen engagement tools, expert advisory support, co creation exercises).
 - Technical support to help small places mobilise and best use this information is valuable, e.g., Small Town Academy, Distriktssenteret, OECD and Municipal Collaboration in Poland
- **Formulation and prioritisation:** effective dialogue and exchange on areas for action is facilitated by training, advisory support, collaboration, and community involvement.
 - Use of new approaches to citizen engagement Rodewisch and projects of the Distriktssenteret
 - Draw lessons from past experience and connect opportunities, build institutional memory and capacity
 - Develop a solid knowledge/understanding of the policy opportunities and potentials, training and expert input
- **Delivery:** Tailored place-based solutions should not imply working in isolation
 - Territorially adapted/solutions across and area with small places facing related challenges, e.g., Alpine Area
 - Collaborative working on capacity building, e.g., facilitated through Interreg, ITI or Region 10
 - Maintain community engagement, adapt, and evolve, e.g., Rodewisch.

- Next Steps



- This report highlights the scope for further exchange on 'collaboration capacity'.³⁸ The Pilot Action examples illustrate the value of joint actions, and synergies. They also reveal areas where 'individual initiatives' have wider connections, which are a 'by product' of activities but could be amplified by further recognising and highlighting links. Related, the pilot action work underlines the importance of working across and between levels of governance and other places, in particular recognising the facilitation role that regional, national and EU initiatives can play.
- The engagement of young people and retention of populations in small places is a recurring feature and an aspect of the work which could be carried forward, again with an emphasis on the value of building synergies between interventions.

Notes

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- ⁶ Ferry, M. et al (2021) Territorial Agenda 2030 A handbook of 52 implemented examples of territorial cohesion at work
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- ⁹ TA 2030, (2022) Actions putting the Territorial Agenda into Practice. A Future for Lagging Regions <https://territorialagenda.eu/pilot-actions/a-future-for-lagging-regions/>
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- ¹¹ CEC (2021) A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous Rural Areas by 20240, CEC, Brussels 30.06.21, p. 6.
- ¹² CEC (2021) A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous Rural Areas by 20240, CEC, Brussels 30.06.21, p. 3.
- ¹³ CEC(2021) A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous, Prosperous Rural Areas by 20240, CEC, Brussels 30.06.21 p. 1 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/DOC/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0345&from=EN>. †
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