Territorial Agenda 2030

#TerritorialAgenda
A future for all places

Draft version, December 2019
Territorial Agenda 2030

A future for all places

I. Preamble

We, the Ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development, in cooperation with the European Commission and with the endorsement of the European Committee of the Regions, have reviewed the Territorial Agenda launched in 2007 and updated in 2011. We agree upon the Territorial Agenda 2030.

We encourage our colleagues in neighbouring countries to take note of the Territorial Agenda and join in on putting it into practice at European, transnational and cross-border level. Where suitable they may use the Territorial Agenda within their countries at national, regional and local level.

We encourage all players involved in spatial planning and territorial development at any administrative level in the EU and its neighbouring countries to join in on putting the Territorial Agenda into practice. The Territorial Agenda applies to all places, focusing on their mutual relations and the well-being of their inhabitants.


The Territorial Agenda provides a framework for action towards territorial cohesion. Promoting territorial cohesion is an aim of the European Union introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon (Art 3. TEU). We believe that territorial cohesion means ensuring a future for all places and people in the EU, building on the diversity of places and the subsidiarity principle. It enables equal opportunities for citizens and enterprises, wherever they are located. Territorial cohesion reinforces solidarity so as to promote convergence and reduce inequalities between better-off places and those with less prosperous future perspectives or lagging behind. This is to the benefit of Europe as a whole and for each individual country.

The objective of the Territorial Agenda is to provide strategic orientations for spatial planning and for strengthening the territorial dimension of all relevant policies at all governance levels. This way, it seeks to contribute to an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe.
We believe that it is essential to limit inequalities, which undermine the basis on which the EU, its Member States and thriving municipalities and regions build their success. This can only be achieved by paying more attention to the diversity of places in Europe, and their development opportunities and challenges.

In line with the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Art. 174 and 175), all policies and actions of the Union should contribute to economic, social and territorial cohesion. Indeed, working towards territorial cohesion, finding the optimal balance between sustainability, inclusiveness and competitiveness and limiting inequalities between people and between places require joint efforts of sector policies, municipal, regional, national and other authorities, as well as the various groups of society. This can be realised through integrated territorial development. To find their own paths of inclusive and sustainable development, municipalities and regions might need external support. This is of particular relevance for places lagging behind and suffering from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.

We call on those relevant for regional development and strategic spatial planning at all levels to take on board the priorities of the Territorial Agenda. Furthermore, we call on those responsible for designing and implementing sector policies – at all levels of governance – to take the priorities of the Territorial Agenda into consideration. The coherence between all EU, national and sub-national policies is of importance for territorial cohesion. Most policies have significant territorial impacts and influence development opportunities of territories in different ways. Coordinating sector policies concerning their territorial impacts and coherence can significantly increase their effectiveness and help avoid, at all geographical scales, negative effects from conflicting policies.

We call upon states, regions, cities, towns and other places at all levels to contribute to ensuring inclusive and sustainable futures for all places and people. Places with common potential or challenges can collaborate in finding common solutions. Places with complementary potential, often neighbouring, can join forces and explore their comparative advantages together creating additional development potential. We shall facilitate their ability to develop more effective policy responses through closer cooperation.

We consider that the place-based approach to policy making contributes to territorial cohesion. It is based on the principles of horizontal and vertical coordination, evidence-informed policy making and integrated territorial development. It addresses various levels of governance (multi-level governance approach), and thereby contributes to implementing the subsidiarity principle. It ultimately aims to unleash unique territorial potential based on place-specific capital, knowledge and assets. Through the development and implementation of regional and local strategies, the place-based approach hence contributes to the long-term development and competitiveness of places.

The place-based approach is a common principle of the Territorial Agenda and the Leipzig Charter. While the Territorial Agenda advocates the place-based approach as overarching principle for all places and policy sectors, the Leipzig Charta provides guidance for applying the place-based approach in urban areas and their wider functional regions.

We call upon communities and societal groups across Europe to contribute to overcoming differences between people and between places. Building bridges between people with different income, educational,
cultural, religious backgrounds is a key concern for keeping Europe together. We shall facilitate cooperation between groups of society to reduce segregation and use our diversity as asset for our well-being.

(17) We believe that the diversity of places in Europe holds underused potential for ensuring a bright future for Europe and all its places. Place-sensitive policy making can help to release untapped potential. Furthermore, we believe that only by joining efforts across sector policies, governance levels, places and societal groups we can achieve an inclusive and sustainable Europe that offers future perspectives for all people and places and that protects our common livelihoods and shapes transition processes.
II. Why do we need to act, now

Recent developments and studies by e.g. ESPON, the European Commission, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and other international, national and regional players, show that Europe faces major challenges but also has great potential. This requires policy responses with a strong territorial dimension and coordinated approaches acknowledging and utilising the diversity of places and their specificities.

Europe consists of different types of places, such as capital regions, metropolitan areas, small and medium-sized towns, rural areas, inner peripheries, peripheral areas, northermost areas, sparsely populated areas, islands, coastal areas, mountainous areas or areas in economic transition. These places show a great variety of development potential and challenges. From the sub-local to the pan-European level, disparities between places and between people as well as environmental risks and pressures increase, not at least due to market-driven economic dynamics, following economies of scales, access to market areas, access to qualified labour, the quality of governance and disparities in public service provision. Furthermore, the links and flows between different places affect a place’s capacity to dwell on its potential or respond to challenges.

Key challenges and potential for local and regional development in Europe are linked to increasing imbalances, as well as the need for a transition to sustainable development and to react to the challenges of climate change. A common feature is the importance of good government and governance.

Good government and governance

The quality of government and governance processes becomes increasingly important for local and regional development. It matters for the well-being of society, is a pre-requisite for long-term sustainable increases in living standards, investments, social trust and political legitimacy. Cooperation across different levels of government and governance to develop and implement place-specific strategies are not used widely enough.

As pointed out in the Seventh Cohesion Report, the quality of government and governance varies across Europe. The largest differences are between countries, but there are also variations within countries. Areas with poor quality of government face diminishing marginal utility and returns of investments in infrastructure, human capital and technology.

People and places drift apart – increasing imbalances and inequalities

Europe’s changing social and economic geography is accompanied by increasing inequalities, driving apart people and places. Some groups of society and communities in some places, feel that European and national objectives and outlooks do not address their concerns and prospects. This is not at least expressed in the debate about the ‘geography of discontent’. Indeed, widening social and economic disparities in Europe increasingly take a spatial dimension. This can be segregation within towns, cities or regions, as well as drifting apart of places within countries or within the EU. A key driver for this is the diversity of future
perspectives, which seem to be more promising for some than for others. It is the role of the Territorial Agenda to emphasise these challenges and bring them to the attention of policy makers.

(27) There are various fields where action is needed, e.g.: 

(28) • **Quality of life**: The underlying objective of all public policies is to increase citizens’ well-being and quality of life. The focus is on multiple factors that influence what people value in life, beyond purely material aspects. This is also linked to shortages of natural resources, social disparities and the awareness that economic growth does not necessarily deliver employment. Thus, it goes beyond economic performance, living standards and purely material aspects. The quality of life has a territorial dimension ranging from disparities between neighbourhoods, e.g. related to social exclusion, to disparities between regions and countries.

(29) • **Services of general interest**: The accessibility, affordability and quality of public services is an important factor contributing to the quality of life and the development of businesses. Needs for greater cost-effectiveness and efficient public management approaches drive services to withdraw or cluster in certain locations. At the same time, expectations to the availability and quality of services rise. Differences in access to services of general interest risk to drive service providers, enterprises and social activities to relocate to areas with better access in the medium to long run. New technologies to provide services online hold potential to reduce the sensitivity of peripheral areas to such relocation processes.

(30) • **Demographic and societal imbalances**: Ageing, domestic and intra-EU migration including depopulation pose particular challenges to our welfare systems and to local and regional development. These demographic dynamics have severe social implications incl. increasingly social exclusion and inequalities, challenges for public service provision, labour markets and housing. Ageing together with migration point at further concentration towards urban areas and depopulation of some rural and peripheral areas. This concerns especially remote areas that lack access to public services, economic and social opportunities. Extra-European migration flows – incl. both outmigration of young and talented people and immigration of refugees – may further perpetuate these challenges.

(31) • **Digitalisation and the 4th industrial revolution**: Digitalisation and disruptive technologies will shape the economic and societal development in Europe. The so-called 4th industrial revolution will lead to fusions of technologies and blur the lines between physical, digital and biological systems. Economic concentration tendencies and the emphasis on new technical solutions which are rolled out globally at once, increasingly create economies where the ‘winner takes it all’ both in terms of companies leading the way to change as well as in terms of locations where these companies and key players are located. This will give a new topicality to regions in economic transition. Their public administrations need to innovate constantly so to prepare for transition processes.

(32) • **Employment and economic development**: Europe is highly interwoven in the global economy. Economic and employment prospects are affected by local development conditions as well as geopolitical developments beyond the influence of local, regional, national and European decision makers. Places with higher levels of competitiveness, innovation and the capacity to invest tend to have better
economic performance and employment opportunities. This reinforces the relative position of better-off places compared to other places in the same country – and further perpetuates disparities and imbalances.

(33) **Interdependencies between places**: While places in Europe are drifting apart, there are also growing interdependencies between places. These imply positive and negative externalities, where developments in one place affect development potential in another. Changes in one part of Europe can have effects in other parts of the continent. These interdependencies are most visible in the economic concentration tendencies and increasing disparities between flourishing (often metropolitan) areas and drained (often rural) areas. It is visible in the persistent core-periphery division in Europe and at national scale. At internal and especially at EU external borders, disparities and differences in legal, social and political systems matter to local and regional developments. Barriers to integration can hamper citizens and result in the underutilisation of human, cultural, economic and ecological resources in border regions and an increase in their peripheral position and social exclusion.

(34) **Global embeddedness**: Local and regional development in Europe is affected by global strategies and developments, e.g. concerning dynamics in Eurasia or the Mediterranean. Many European citizens and enterprises participate in worldwide networks – of social and/or economic nature. In consequence, the development of European regions, cities and towns is linked to places elsewhere in the world, and the flows of goods, services, investments, people and ideas between these places. In short, exogenous developments influence development perspectives of places in Europe. Their potential and vulnerabilities linked to global developments are not equally distributed across Europe’s towns, cities and regions.

(35) **Sustainable development and climate change – increasing pressures**

(36) Global challenges in the field of sustainable development are highly relevant for local and regional development in Europe. This concerns not at least climate change, environmental degradation and the transition to a climate-neutral economy. The growing urgency to address climate change and approach a transition to more sustainable development are emphasised widely in political and societal debates. This is not at least underlined by the UN ‘Sustainable Development Goals’. The transition to sustainable development holds different potential and challenges for different types of towns, cities and regions.

(37) There are various fields where action is needed:

(38) **Climate change**: The impacts of climate change vary considerably across Europe in terms of geographical regions with different types of impacts and different degrees of vulnerability. The increased risk of sea-level rise, drought, desertification, floods and other natural hazards calls for place-specific responses. Climate change mitigation and adaptation actions can even bring new development opportunities for places. This can be e.g. in the fields of agriculture, bioeconomy, green / circular economy and renewable energy production. The impacts of climate change as well as of mitigation and adaptation actions depend on the territorial context and require tailor made responses at different governance levels.
• **Loss of biodiversity and land consumption:** The rapid loss of biodiversity pose severe risks to our ecosystems and our long-term living conditions. This affects the livelihood of our ecosystems and thus our quality of life and local and regional economies. Increasing land take and land sealing are a particular challenge to the function of our ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services. They e.g. reduce open spaces, biodiversity, and fertile soil and contribute to urban heat islands.

• **Healthy quality of air, soil and water:** Air, soil and water quality are essential for the well-being of European citizens. Air pollution, noise, emissions from contaminated soil and polluted ground water cause serious health problems. This can correlate with social inequality. Disparities in access to clean air, water and soil exist not only between countries and regions but also between urban and rural areas, as well as inside towns and cities.

• **Secure, affordable and sustainable energy:** European citizens and enterprises having access to sustainable, secure and affordable energy supplies is important for local and regional development. Significant imports from third countries vulnerable to economic or political instability increase problems for energy security. Rising energy prices and emissions draw attention to the need for sustainable solutions such as renewable energy and a shift towards greener, low carbon economic activities. Insufficient energy infrastructure and dependence on existing networks call for diversification of energy production and supply, as well as energy market development and integration.

• **Just transition:** Investments in renewable energy production, energy savings and low carbon industries are needed all over Europe. Local economies directly or indirectly depending on the coal sector or heavy industry, which are highly energy intensive or polluting, are particularly challenged by this transition. Just transition can shift the economy away from these forms of production while maintaining quality of life for all, as it recognises that the poorest, most vulnerable people may suffer the greatest impacts of adjusting to a climate-neutral economy.

• **Circular regional value chains:** The circular economy is an economic model which aims to close material and energy loops through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing and recycling. An important feature are industrial symbiosis processes in regional value chains. In general, urban areas are better positioned to pick up this trend than sparsely populated areas and inner peripheries which often lack critical mass. Towns and cities as well as places with high levels of craftmanship might benefit from the circular economy in terms of repairing, reusing and sharing activities.

• **Natural, landscape and cultural heritage:** Natural and cultural heritage are local and regional development assets that offer unique development opportunities. Sustainable use of resources should benefit local communities and promote local business opportunities. Overexploitation of these assets on the other hand, can threaten the basis of a local or regional economy. Urbanisation, intense agriculture and fisheries, transport and other infrastructure developments, particularly when uncoordinated locally, can cause severe problems. Increased and uncoordinated exploitation of maritime space and marine resources may have consequences for sustainable development. Changes
in land and sea use, urbanisation and mass tourism threaten cultural assets and landscapes and may lead to fragmentation of natural habitats and ecological corridors.

(45) **Need to act**

(46) In Europe, increasing inequalities between places and between people as well as unsustainable developments have reached a critical level. They risk undermining the basis on which the EU, its Member States and thriving municipalities and regions build their success. Therefore, it is about time for concerted action at all geographical and governance levels to ensure positive future perspectives for all people, communities and places in Europe. This way, we seek to contribute to sustainable development and to keeping the EU together.
III. Territorial Priorities for Europe

We believe that action is needed to ensure a sustainable future for all places and people in Europe. Actions must be based on

- a common understanding that development needs and impacts of future developments differ between places (towns, cities and regions) in Europe; and

- cooperation and integration of places, policy sectors and groups of society to address complex issues and utilise diverse potential.

We therefore define two overarching objectives, a Just Europe and a Green Europe, broken down into six priorities for the development of the European territory as a whole and all its places:

1. **A JUST EUROPE that offers future perspectives for all places and people**

The priorities for a Just Europe underline the territorial dimension of and spatial planning contribution to various overarching policy priorities, such as economic, social and territorial cohesion, the European Pillar of Social Rights, a Europe closer to citizens, sustainable and integrated development of places, just transition, territorial integration in Europe.

1a. **BALANCED EUROPE: Better balanced territorial development utilising Europe’s diversity**

Europe’s territorial diversity offers considerable development potential. This can contribute to a better balanced territorial development, counteracting concentration tendencies and reducing inequalities between people and between places. Cooperation in polycentric networks of cities and regions contribute to spreading development potential more evenly. Therefore, we will take action to encourage neighbourhoods, municipalities, counties, regions and Member States to cooperate on improving the quality for working, living and investing in all places and strengthening economic prosperity and global competitiveness throughout Europe.

Polarisation between capitals, metropolitan areas, cities, towns, rural areas and areas with geographic specificities challenges a better-balanced territorial development. Especially, small and medium-sized towns have underexploited potential to cushion polarisation. They play a crucial role for the economic development and social well-being at regional level. We will invite policy makers from all levels of governance to promote polycentric development models that offer a role for all towns and cities.

Europe comprises diverse special types of territories, such as coastal zones, islands, mountainous areas, inner peripheries, plains, river valleys and lake basins. Due to their remoteness and distinct characteristics, outermost regions face particular development challenges. All these territories have unique development challenges and potential. Therefore, we will take action to encourage decision makers at all governance levels to unleash the unique potential of territories with specific geographies and adequately address the constraints of these areas through integrated and cooperative approaches.
1b. FUNCTIONAL REGIONS: Local and regional development and less inequalities between places

Cities and towns of all sizes are motors of economic and societal development and attractive places for living, working, visiting and investing. Cooperation and networking within and between cities and towns create development perspectives for all places, e.g. within functional regions that break with existing administrative delineations, differ according to the function, are highly dynamic and can shift over time. When decision-makers in cities and towns look beyond their administrative borders, focus on functional regions and cooperate with their hinterlands, they help their places to serve as motors for intra-regional growth and for the benefit, and not at the expense, of their surrounding communities and rural areas. Together they shall ensure that cities and towns offer a healthy and affordable living environment. We will search the dialogue with decision makers in cities and towns of all sizes to apply an integrated multilevel governance approach. This means to involve players from different governance levels, policy sectors and groups of society.

Europe has diverse urban, peri-urban, rural, peripheral, and sparsely populated areas. Some of these suffer from segregation or face severe depopulation. Their development is closely related to their unique local characteristics and the relationships with other places, their accessibility and access to public services, their diversified economic activities and entrepreneurship, and their ecological functions and ecosystem services. Therefore, we will engage with local and regional decision makers to strengthen cooperation on long-term place-based strategies for these areas and address functional links between neighbouring areas, e.g. through integrated territorial investments (ITI) or community-led local development (CLLD), which are part of EU Cohesion Policy.

1c. INTEGRATION BEYOND BORDERS: Living and working across national borders

Territorial and maritime cooperation between places from different countries helps to make better use of development potential. Joining forces beyond borders, e.g. Interreg programmes and projects, can create critical mass for development, promote synergies, and diminish economic, social and ecological fragmentation and negative externalities. This concerns e.g. ecosystems, cultural heritage, labour markets, public service provisions or city networks divided by borders. It is relevant at both EU internal and external as well as land and maritime borders. We will take action to embed stable cross-border, transnational and macro-regional cooperation in national, regional and local development strategies. Strategic Interreg cooperation, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), functional regions and legal cross-border agreements are examples of stable approaches that facilitate cooperation between different administrative areas and go beyond single cooperation projects.

Still today there are many legal and administrative obstacles to deepening cooperation beyond borders. Therefore, we will intensify the dialogue with policy makers at all governance levels to coordinate relevant national sector policies between countries and diminish existing obstacles to cooperation.
2. A GREEN EUROPE that protects our common livelihoods and shapes societal transition processes

The priorities for a Green Europe underline the territorial dimension of and spatial planning contribution to various overarching policy priorities, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a European Green Deal, the Paris Agreement, Europe fit for the digital age, sustainable mobility and a fully integrated European transport network, transition to a circular economy in Europe.

2a. HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT: Better ecological livelihoods and climate-neutral towns, cities and regions

Ecosystems are the bases of our existence and important for long-term sustainable development. It is a joint responsibility to ensure that they are well-functioning, resilient and enhanced – not at least to mitigate climate change, combat the loss of biodiversity and ensure the provision with eco-system services. Joint management is particularly important, taking into consideration different geographical specificities. We support the development of nature-based solutions and green infrastructure networks, that link ecosystems and protected areas, in the field of spatial planning and other relevant policies.

Climate change and the loss of biodiversity risk to erode our livelihood. They make the functioning of our ecosystems – i.e. agroecosystems, forest ecosystems, grassland ecosystems and marine ecosystems – and the provision of ecosystem services a shared concern. Risk and disaster management as well prevention measures are important tools to build resilient communities. We will respect the natural limits of our common livelihoods and increase the resilience of all places to the impact of climate change. This can be done by means of developing local and regional strategies for climate-neutral towns, cities and regions. This includes actions to promote sustainable land-use, combat deforestation, preserve our oceans and water bodies, prevent urban sprawl and urban heat islands, contribute to the objective of no net land-take by 2050, and strengthen the delivery of ecosystem services that generate income for local populations and businesses.

Europe’s natural and cultural heritage is an important asset, to be protected and further developed. Areas rich in natural and cultural landscapes need to make best use of these assets. Hereby, they need to balance nature conservation and the creation of environmentally friendly jobs. We will concentrate our work on strengthening the awareness and empowering local and regional communities to protect, rehabilitate, utilise and reutilise their (built) environments, landscapes, cultures and other unique values, e.g. through community-led local development (CLLD).

2b. CIRCULAR ECONOMY: Strong and sustainable local economies in a globalised world

Circularity is managing material and energy flows, which ultimately contributes to carbon neutrality and to creating a Green Europe. This includes reuse and recycling of products such as building materials based on life-cycle assessment, and energy renovation of buildings. The transition of our economies towards a place-based circular and climate-neutral model has a territorial dimension. The economic prosperity of places depends on the competitiveness and creativity of their enterprises and start-ups as well as on local
assets, characteristics and traditions, cultural, social and human capital and innovation capacities. In a
globalised economy, this implies a need for building industrial symbiosis processes which bring together
global competitiveness and local assets. We support Europe’s transition to a circular economy and the
development of place-based industrial symbiosis processes.

(69) To better utilise Europe’s multifaceted territorial assets for the transition to a circular economy, we will
support the development of local and regional circular economy strategies linking local and global
economies. These strategies should build on local assets and the capacity to innovate, and bring together
the energy and economic transition processes towards a place-based circular economy, e.g. by means of
smart specialisation strategies.

(70) Diversified local economies help to reduce vulnerability to external forces and (energy & economic) transition
processes. Local products, markets, business environments, training, entrepreneurship, increased self-
sufficiency and local communities are important for resilient local economies. Therefore, we will take action
to encourage the diversification of local economies and efforts to strengthen innovation capacities in all
regions, including local strategies for an energy transition and suitable measures in the building, transport
and bioeconomy sectors.

(71) **2c. SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS: Sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places**

(72) The transition to a digital society can support decentralised and sustainable developments. The possibility
for e-inclusion, i.e. people, enterprises and places to benefit from digitalisation, depends on the fair and
affordable access to high-quality internet and next generation mobile phone connections. This particularly
concerns the access to e-governance and e-services of general interest affecting the quality of life and
competitiveness of places. We will invite relevant players to a dialogue on the need for adequate access to
high-speed internet and mobile phone networks in all places, and the need for a digital infrastructure with a
low carbon footprint. This can help to achieve adequate living and business conditions in all places across
Europe.

(73) In a globalised economy, access to inter-modal freight and passenger transport is important for all places
in Europe. To achieve the climate objectives, efficient and environmentally friendly transport solutions
become ever more important. This includes sea, air and rail connections as well as effective combinations
thereof. Overland connections gain importance for trade with Asia. We will take action to further improve the
link between regional planning and the development of Trans-European Networks (TEN), as linking all
places with major transport nodes supports international trade connections and local development
opportunities.

(74) Secondary and local transport networks, which link to transnational networks and urban centres, are
essential for the quality of life and business opportunities. This is a particular concern for towns, rural,
peripheral areas, islands and outermost regions. We will invite spatial planners and transport planners to
explore new models for local and regional mobility as a service, and to cooperate on multimodal and
environmentally friendly access to urban centres, e.g. through integrated territorial investments (ITI).
IV. Putting priorities into action

(76) **Calls upon key players. Currently under development.**

(77) **Implementation through pilot actions. Currently under development.**

(78) **Coordination. Currently under development.**

(79) **Next steps. Currently under development.**