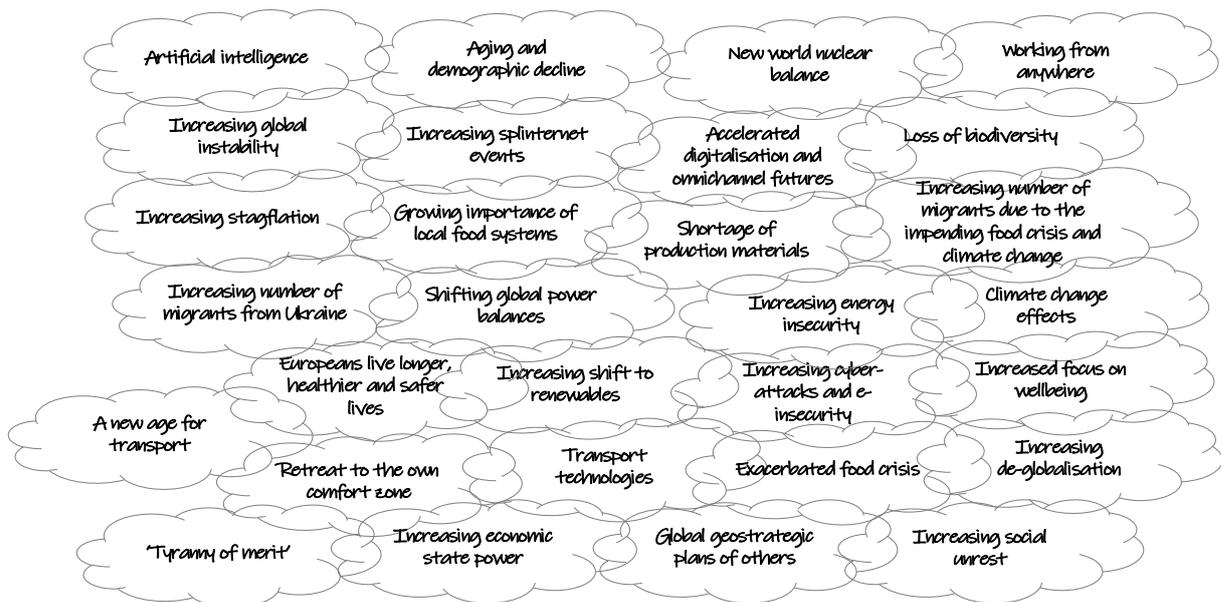


# The Territorial Agenda & trends shaping territorial cohesion

Think piece for the Directors General responsible for Territorial Cohesion (DGTC) meeting during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2023

by Kai Böhme

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# 1 Introduction

Recent years have shown that we live in a rapidly changing world with many uncertainties. The green, digital and demographic transitions ahead of us, along with multiple mega-trends suggest we will experience more changes and disruptive events in the years to come. What does this imply for the Territorial Agenda 2030?

After a process stretching over several years, Territorial Agenda 2030 was finalised in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The policy context and development challenges have changed since then. This includes increased financial constraints, seemingly continuous crises and new transition challenges, especially concerning energy and security. Most of these changes could increase inequalities between people and places in Europe. This makes the Territorial Agenda objective more relevant than ever: a future for all places in a green and just Europe.

This think piece brings together trends which are expected to affect territorial cohesion in the coming years (see section 2). It is based on [blog posts](#) which review studies for the [European Parliament](#) (2022), the [European Committee of the Regions](#) (2021) and [ESPON](#) (2022). These studies analyse international trend studies and processes, collecting insights from diverse stakeholders. Taken together, the collection provides a rich picture of possibilities which may shape territorial development and cohesion in Europe.

To better understand potential implications for Territorial Agenda 2030, these trends are placed in a wider context related to the capacity to navigate under uncertainty (section 3.1) and the need for a common sense of direction (section 3.2). Finally, section 3.3 reviews what this implies for the continued relevance of Territorial Agenda 2030 and possible actions to be taken to face changing realities. This part also draws on previous work carried out by ESPON.

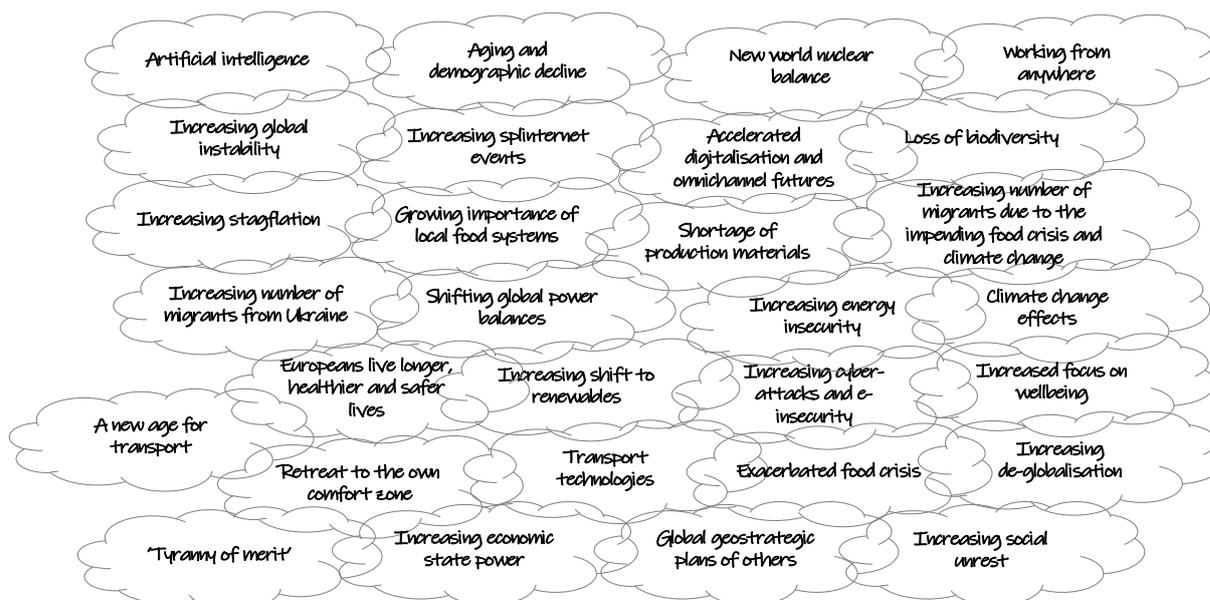
The think piece serves as a discussion input to the meeting of Directors General responsible for Territorial Cohesion (DGTC) during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2023.



## 2 Mega-trends shaping territorial cohesion

Social, technological, economic, environmental and political trends will probably exacerbate spatial and societal fragmentation, as well as interdependencies and policy mismatches. This is likely to increase uncertainty and vulnerability in a world of disruptive changes and lead to 'pervasive uncertainty'.

Figure 1 Selected mega-trends



Source: Spatial Foresight (2022)

Trends that may have the strongest impacts on territorial development and cohesion include exogenous technological trends (e.g. digital society, post-carbon and circular economy), social change (e.g. migration, aging, fluid social institutions and shifts in values), environmental (e.g. adapting/mitigating climate change and managing scarce resources), and economic (e.g. slowbalisation, peak of everything, working from anywhere). Political trends also play an important role, both developments in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world which affect development prospects in Europe.

In many regards the trends point to a risk of increased concentration on urban areas with growing territorial imbalances and inequalities. This may translate into social fragmentation and more discontent.

### 2.1 Technological trends

Technological progress is a driver of economic and social change, potentially severely impacting spatial development in Europe. Developments that will shape future perspectives range from social and new media as well as big data mining and processing to automation, digitisation, artificial intelligence and bio-tech. Technology that blurs the lines between physical, digital and biological systems is expected to have disruptive effects. These can relate to work organisation, social engagement and the transformation of industry, health and education. In the initial phase, technological change will



exacerbate spatial inequalities. Technological revolutions and industrial transformations lead to spatial concentration as they accelerate developments where the 'winner takes all'.

Some technological mega-trends to be considered are:

- **Artificial intelligence:** Technological developments – especially artificial intelligence (AI), automation and bio-tech – influence our lives and work. Already today, we mingle virtual reality with real life. The Internet of Things and AI are evermore present, while job automation and high internet connectivity are changing our daily lives. Recent discussions on AI chatbots and deep AI illustrate the scope and range of potential disruptions.
- **Accelerated digitalisation and an omnichannel future:** COVID-19 restrictions brought a tremendous boost to digitalisation in Europe. Just think of home offices, videoconferences, e-learning, e-governance, e-commerce and e-entertainment. In some areas the pandemic accelerated developments and changed mainstream behaviour, which will be further shaped in years to come. This concerns the increasing shift to a co-existence of digital and physical offers, such as omnichannel retail, led by digital shopping. Omnichannel approaches are also expected to be used more frequently for e.g. (tertiary) education and entertainment.
- **Transport:** Particularly for spatial development, the future of transport is important. This ranges from expected changes to e-mobility, self-driving cars and buses, drones transporting goods and people, to new transport systems such as the hyperloop.
- **Increasing cyber-attacks and e-insecurity.** Technological trends influenced by Russia's war on Ukraine are especially linked to security and protection. Increased cyber security is essential, including reducing third party dependence. Attacks concern not only the digital world, but also physical infrastructure and technological supply chains. Cyber-security is an essential dimension of resilience and the transition to a green and digital future.
- **Increasing splinternet events.** Increasing tensions between governmental territoriality and the technical realm suggest the internet might move from a world-wide-web into a splinternet or cyber-balkanisation. This would involve parallel transnational 'internets' connecting like-minded parts of the world. Splinternet tendencies are not new, but they could intensify as political and commercial interests put different restrictions on free use of the tool.

Linked to territorial development and cohesion, technological 'revolutions' and transitions generate network effects which often lead to economic and spatial concentration. This implies more cohesion challenges in the years to come. Only after a technological 'revolution' can we expect a phase of technology diffusion with convergence between economic players and places.

At the same time, following Smihula's further development of Kondratiev waves or cycles of industrial revolutions, each new wave is shorter than the previous one. This is mainly due to accelerated scientific and technological progress. The prospect of ever faster technological 'revolutions' poses considerable



challenges to cohesion. It may imply ever shorter phases of economic and spatial concentration , followed by shorter periods of technological diffusion and cohesion.

## 2.2 Environmental trends

The Anthropocene, i.e. the era where we humans are responsible for climate change, is causing dramatic consequences for the environment. Climate change has been an emerging issue for decades. The long-term impacts will change development perspectives in the decades to come, with increased earth and sea temperatures and more extreme and intense events such as floods, droughts and forest fires, damaging both nature and people.

In addition, the loss of biodiversity, sea pollution and other developments will become ever more relevant. All of this will undercut the basis of livelihoods, the economy and spatial development. Human activities leading to pollution and soil sealing have caused a continuous and rapid decline in biodiversity. Current extinctions are 100 – 1,000 times higher than the baseline, and many ecosystems have been degraded beyond repair or are at risk of ‘tipping points’. In addition, the threat of pollinator extinction due to environmental pollution, climate change, intensive agriculture and land use change poses risks for the production of food, cotton, linen, biofuel and construction material. Insects are vital for 78% of wildflower species and 84% of agricultural crop species.

The underlying drivers include increased growth, overproduction and overconsumption, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution and high energy demands. This leads to increased needs to mitigate and adapt to climate change, decarbonise and ensure climate-neutral objectives. Other concerns include balancing sustainable development with potential impacts on social disparities, poverty and increasing clashes between societal groups.

Besides these overarching trends, other issues relate to energy, agricultural production and behavioural changes:

- **Increasing energy insecurity.** The energy shocks caused by Russia’s war on Ukraine are profound. The conflict has reversed the trend of lower energy prices and shown how much the EU depends on Russian energy. This impacts the EU’s climate policy and carbon neutrality plans for 2050, as high energy prices could reduce the capacity and willingness of consumers and businesses to cover the energy transition costs. This may also delay the green transition, with several member states prolonging coal production.
- **Increasing shift to renewables.** On the other hand, these developments might also accelerate the green transition. The shift towards more renewable energy production is at a ‘make or break’ point. Policies such as RePowerEU help to reduce energy dependency on Russia, increase the uptake of renewable resources, accelerate hydrogen production and decarbonise industry. Such investments and actions affect biodiversity, as energy installations and infrastructure may pose risks to natural habitats.
- **Exacerbated food and water crisis.** Food security is also a higher risk. Although this is already challenged by climate change, extensive droughts and intense agriculture, the war has exacerbated



the risk. Ukraine is a key food basket providing the EU and large parts of the world with cereal. Exports and production are currently limited, while Russia is a key exporter of both cereal and fertilizers but faces sanctions. This may cause a global food crisis, with higher food prices and inflation also in the EU. In parallel, increasing water scarcity increases the risk of water shortages for agriculture, industries and citizens, also in the EU.

- **Growing importance of local food systems.** During the pandemic mobility was restricted and many shops closed so people often turned to local producers. These developed their offer for local customers, sometimes starting local delivery services. This change started with consumer behaviour and producers reorganised their businesses. Shorter agricultural production chains and local circuits could continue, especially if supported by local policies.
- **A new age for transport.** Driven by our behavioural changes, post-pandemic scenarios include important transformations in transport leading to fewer road passengers. In parallel the market for electric vehicles is projected to grow by 65% over the next decade. In such a scenario, electric vehicles would make up 16% of the fleet by 2030. This trend is clearly accelerated in comparison to a scenario with no pandemic, but depends on many parameters. There could be a decline in private car ownership and increase in public transport. Air passenger transport may be some 21% lower by 2030 compared to a no-pandemic scenario, due to energy efficiency and declining activity. Technological innovation in aviation such as electric or hydrogen powered aircraft is expected to have an impact only from 2030 on.

## 2.3 Societal and demographic trends

Asymmetries will shape future global demographic and societal developments, which risks accelerating differences between places with high land use pressure and shrinking areas as well as between prosperous and poor places and social groups.

In a global perspective, while some countries and societies will get steadily older, others will have low median ages. The most attractive and fastest growing centres are expected to be outside the EU and may increasingly attract talent from Europe. In Europe, aging will remain the key influence on demographics with significant impacts on pension systems, social values and lifestyles. Other European trends include increased migration, both external and internal. As a result, retrospective political values may be more popular across Europe in the coming years. Taken together, demographic trends negatively impact territorial development objectives. Asymmetric global demographic growth can result in more fragmentation across spaces. Similarly, these trends may exacerbate interdependencies across territories or may ignore them (when it comes to closing borders), highlighting a simultaneous misalignment of geographical areas for decision making.

Some societal and demographic trends to be considered:

- **Aging and demographic decline.** This will be a growing challenge for European municipalities, regions and even countries. Eurostat's long-term population projections are for a small population increase in the EU-27, from 447 million inhabitants in 2019 to a peak of around 449 million in 2026. Then the total is expected to decline, gradually decreasing to 441 million in 2050 and 416 million in



2100. By 2050, 77% of European NUTS3 areas may be dealing with population decline or shrinkage. This will influence the labour market, health and social care, citizens' quality of life, the housing market, education and childcare, as well as the EU's place in the world.

- **Europeans live longer, healthier and safer lives.** Life expectancy at birth has increased steadily, and in 2070 is expected to reach 86.1 years for men and 90.3 for women. This trend may pause due to the current energy crisis and recession. Nonetheless, the EU is on the verge of a silver tsunami, where the elderly occupy most of the demographic picture. By 2070, an estimated 30% of people will be over 65, while the working age population is projected to decrease to 51%. At the same time, the birth rate continues to decrease, making it difficult to keep a constant population size without migration.
- **More migrants from Ukraine.** Millions of Ukrainians have fled their country since the outbreak of war. By early August 2022, about 11 million people had left, with over six million going to Europe. In the short term, such an influx puts additional pressure on countries hosting refugees. In addition, support requires extra efforts from administrations and people in the regions where they arrive first, then later where they end up living. However, as stated above, in the medium- to long-term the refugees might also be a welcome addition to the labour market and cushion some effects of demographic aging and decline.
- **More migrants due to the food crisis and climate change.** Large migration waves from neighbouring countries are also expected. Geopolitical crises and climate change risk causing a food crisis, triggering major migration waves from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Half of Africa's wheat imports come from Ukraine and Russia, which also supplies fertilisers. This worsens the situation, creating a shockwave in food markets and exacerbating global hunger. There are direct implications for poorer and famine-hit places in the world that highly depend on Russian and Ukrainian imports. In addition, Europe may face increased immigration from areas heavily affected by climate change.

Certainly, all this puts pressure on public budgets, social inclusion, education and the labour market. It also sets further challenges to the position of the EU in the world, with Europe's share of world population reducing while, at the same time, there are implications for GDP. Other larger societal trends will also impact land use demands in the coming years, including:

- **Retreat to a comfort zone:** Tribalism, cocooning or 'home-nesting', a digitalised or e-society and inertia to change are just some of the social trends shaping future developments.
- **'Tyranny of merit'**. There are growing voices arguing that the pursuit of meritocracy has betrayed the working class, putting them aside. A populist backlash is a revolt against this 'tyranny', which implies a lack of success is due to one's lack of abilities. This has implications on the way people see inequality in a wider perspective, also in relation to their work.
- **Increasing social unrest.** A possible result of the war on Ukraine is increased poverty. The surge in commodity prices including energy and food has increased living costs and possibly the risk of



'social instability' driven by high prices. An example is the widespread social unrest of the 'yellow vest' movement in France, where people protested against high prices.

- **Increased focus on wellbeing.** Another trend that points to a shift in the way of life, is a greater focus on people's wellbeing. Especially during the pandemic and continuing today, people have realised the importance of a good quality of life. There is even talk about the 'end of ambition' where employees quit their jobs in pursuit of better or less stressful ones, changing the presumption that work is the most important thing in life.

## 2.4 Economic trends

Economic changes are subject to external and internal shocks and global interrelations. Already before the pandemic and the outbreak of war, new economic and trade trends were under discussion. De-globalisation, slowbalisation and economic partnerships based on values have appeared in recent years. Technological developments that replace low-skilled staff, the gradual convergence of unskilled workers in Europe and Asia, as well as the u-turn of public opinion against globalisation, evident in elections and protectionist choices, have increased de-globalisation. Proposing a less connected world, with powerful nation states became more popular, including with BREXIT and Trumpism.

At the same time, the pandemic and Russia's war on Ukraine have brought a shock to the global economic outlook, with commodity prices and global value chains being disrupted. This is lowering EU growth, increasing inflation and upsetting global markets.

Some economic trends to be considered:

- **Increasing de-globalisation.** Although the seeds of this trend were seen earlier, the pandemic and then the war in Ukraine have accelerated it. Increased global tensions, the war and increased competition have pushed companies to focus on economic blocs and shorten their supply chains. This has increased repatriation, onshoring, reshoring and nearshoring for strategic goods, reviving the nation state as the key economic power. Already such effects were visible during the pandemic, which accentuated the strategic importance of value chains for medical equipment, microelectronics and batteries. This is reducing globalisation, including within Europe with the repatriation, onshoring and nearshoring of production and increased resilience.
- **Increasing stagflation.** Inflation in the euro area is expected to surge further, mainly due to energy and food prices, as well as supply and logistics bottlenecks. The latter are projected to increase and challenge growth stability. In addition, the war has magnified the slowdown in global growth with immense consequences for low- and middle-income economies. This could intensify stagflation, as inflation peaks and growth decreases, risking a global recession.
- **Increasing economic state power.** Policies to counterbalance the economic effects will probably include tighter subsidy and monetary policies. There may also be stricter national policies, with more involvement to ensure economic and political stability, as well to guarantee social welfare and related benefits.



- **Shortage of production materials.** For some time, the supply of several resources has clearly been depleting due to population growth, environmental stress, etc. The war on Ukraine affects agricultural products, but also materials necessary for industrial production, such as palladium and neon. Shortages of wood have led to less construction and a lack of microchips has affected car production. Temporary shortages of parts and raw materials may continue, and we may move towards a 'peak of everything'.
- **Working from anywhere.** People's working lives changed during the pandemic. Further economic effects may come from the changing nature of work, whose consequences may only be visible in the very long term. Working from home and teleworking accelerated substantially during the lockdowns. Demand has increased over decades, with more than half the workforce already looking for more opportunities to work from home. With the support of technology, some people can work from anywhere, anytime, initiating a new geography of work. In addition, there are trials of a 4-day workweek in several countries.

## 2.5 Political trends

Endogenous factors can be influenced (more) directly by policy makers. It is mainly political majorities which determine how political and policy priorities guide decision making and choices. At a global level, there are several antipodal developments. On the one hand, global tensions are increasing with a tendency to building blocks and protectionism. On the other hand, there are multilateral agreements including on climate change and free trade, although it is hard to keep all governments committed to their implementation (e.g. Paris Climate Agreement, Iran Nuclear Deal). Some developments focus on Europe's position in the world, including external security threats which lead to more protection for EU external borders. There are also internal efforts to preserve the European economic and social model in times of crisis, increased divergence in the quality of government, as well as the rise of populism, liberative democracies and nationalism.

Some political trends to be considered:

- **Shifting global power balances.** In recent decades the world order has been shifting to the east with China becoming a global economic player. This has changed the predominant western power status quo, with the US considering China as a major threat. The war on Ukraine further adds to global power imbalances, creating precedents for countries to claim other territories, but also initiating a new global nuclear balance.
- **Increasing global instability.** The Russian invasion may trigger further global instability and increase global tensions. There are more discussions about a potential invasion of Taiwan by China, or Turkey attacking Syria to push back Kurdish fighters.
- **New world nuclear balance.** Nuclear weapons have long been a balancing act for global powers. The Russian invasion puts a new element to this nuclear order, as Russia has repeatedly used a nuclear attack as a threat. This threat was growing before the Russian invasion, with North Korea, Iran, Pakistan and China expanding their arsenal. The war adds to this, putting non-nuclear



countries at more risk and possibly adding incentives to 'go nuclear' or create additional precedents for countries with nuclear weapons to threaten others.

- **Global geostrategic plans.** Various strategies and plans of non-European governments or multinational corporations include – implicitly or explicitly – ideas for the future of Europe. In addition, some of these plans and ambitions do not address Europe but will still indirectly affect the EU (e.g. Chinese Belt & Road Initiative, Chinese Cooperation Framework with Central and Eastern European Countries, US trade policies, Google server locations and research). The future of Europe will also be dramatically affected by demographic growth in Africa, global migration (including climate refugees), trade liberalisation, protectionism and environmental regulations, as well as changes in computing, communication, transport, energy and biotechnology.



### 3 Implications for the Territorial Agenda

We live in times of change, transitions and uncertainties. Hunter (2023) also describes it as times of 'permacrisis' with rapid and disruptive changes including changing geopolitical dynamics.

The above trends provide a taste of changes and dynamics we may face in the coming years. A combined picture suggests that future trends are likely to exacerbate spatial and societal fragmentation, interdependencies and policy mismatches. In many regards the trends point to a risk of increased concentration on urban areas with growing territorial imbalances and inequalities, which may translate into social fragmentation and more discontent. This also risks increased perceptions of uncertainty and vulnerability in a world of disruptive changes leading to 'pervasive uncertainties'. Managing such uncertainties will require more resilience.

Thinking about how to increase resilience, the future uncertainties require decision-making in which costs and benefits are separated by very long time-lags. Furthermore, they are about intrinsically complex coupled social–ecological systems. They are also about producing global collective goods that go beyond the scope of unilateral 'single-best efforts' of any player. (Duit, Galaz, Eckerberg, & Ebbesson, 2010)

This radical shift of our perspective on decision making is accompanied by increased decision-making capacity in the face of uncertainty guided by a shared sense of direction and a multifaceted understanding of resilience.

#### 3.1 Navigate under uncertainty

How to ensure the capability to navigate under uncertainty? This is a basic question for increasing resilience. Resilience relies heavily on territorial governance capacities, including knowledge management, self-organisation, the capability to learn and a willingness to adapt. This can be translated into key capacities:

- **Foresight.** Knowledge about the complexity of our present world and its dynamics is essential. However, this needs to come with a forward-looking perspective. Foresight approaches teach us that many disruptive changes come with early warning signs. However, these are often weak signals that easily go unnoticed or are only spotted by a few players.
- **Capacity to react.** Resilience does not mean a 'return to equilibrium', as there is no 'true equilibrium'. It means a constant need to find 'new' equilibriums balancing stability and flexibility. This requires the capacity to react and think about possible alternatives and new scenarios and how to achieve them.
- **Transformation willingness.** Knowledge foresight and adaptive capacity will only help if there is a willingness to transform. This goes together with a shared vision of a desirable future responding to changing circumstances, which implies overcoming societal inertia to take disruptions as opportunities for long-term strategic change. It is difficult enough to define a shared vision for a



future substantially different from the present, but the willingness to transform must move from vision to action. There is no blueprint of the future, so this action will need to balance a high degree of (a) experimentation and self-organisation, and (b) powerful and fullhearted effort to change. In other words, it needs to balance diverse semi-independent networks and players to test their paths to the vision (Duit et al., 2010) with a full on 'mission economy' where all efforts are aligned to the envisaged future (Mazzucato, 2021).

- **Things need to change.** What future do we want? Today's main forces for change tend to be responsive rather than proactive. They are driven by fears and a nostalgic desire to revive the past. It seems this has been accelerated by the pandemic. Today, change is rarely driven by positive future visions or dreams. Today, Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech would risk being unheard, rather than accelerating change.

Suckert and Schommertz (2021) describe this as 'future fatigue' in society. After a crisis, which leads to increased social disparities, it is even more difficult to establish a shared vision of a positive future. If resilience concerns the ability to reorganise rather than to 'bounce-back', we risk standing empty handed. It seems the future itself is in crisis. This links to the debate about an imaginary crisis (Mulgan, 2020) and need to move from 'what is' to 'what if' to create the future we want (Hopkins, 2019).

### 3.2 Shared sense of direction

To prepare for better resilience, we need to develop a commonly shared vision for Europe and its territory (ESPON, 2019). This needs to offer a future for all places and people in Europe (Territorial Agenda, 2020) and guide a wide range of policies and investments – following the idea of a 'mission economy' (Mazzucato, 2021).

In many regards, this comes very close to what Kivimaa (2023) describes as shared visioning and institutional change. Drawing on sustainability transition research, she identifies key capabilities needed to support transitions and change socio-technical systems. This is also what is needed to strengthen policy coordination and focus on potential synergies between policies.

A key capability is shared visioning and institutional change. This requires explicit and inclusive vision building processes, substantial and ambitious legislative and organisational changes, political ambition, long-term political commitment and resources for multiple socio-technical pathways.

To achieve this while also intermediating and orchestrating at different levels is necessary. Drawing on Kivimaa's lessons for transition, there are different types of intermediaries. First are systemic intermediaries who operate on all levels and take the lead in aiming for change in the whole system. There are also regime-based intermediaries, who are tied to the prevailing socio-technical regime and have a mandate to promote change. There are also niche and process intermediaries who facilitate change processes and experimentation often focusing on particular niches. If change in these niches is successful, it can later be upscaled to other areas.

The focus on shared visioning and institutional change driven by a wide range of intermediaries is closely tied to a governance culture oriented to deep learning. As Kivimaa underlines, governance culture needs



to change by taking a more open approach to deep learning, unlearning, uncertainty and risks. This, for example, means allowing civil servants to experiment. Governance cultures are not easy to change and may need leadership and new intermediaries within public administrations. This echoes the need for transformation willingness and the capability to navigate under uncertainty.

#### **Resilience requires governance and the capacity to act:**

- **‘Legal’** focuses on decision-making power and formal competences or capacities in a multi-level government system.
- **‘Navigating under uncertainty’** goes one step further, addressing adaptation capacities which are particularly important to resilience and transformation. This involves capacities related to knowledge and the willingness to change.
- **‘Punching above their weight’** connects collaboration capacity with leadership capacity. This involves local leadership as well as agile local administrations.
- **‘Mobilising people’** focuses on collaboration capacity including the capacity to mobilise local players and civil society, as well as the ability to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities or join forces with other small urban areas addressing similar issues.
- **‘Mobilising resources’** covers financial capacities including own resources and access to external financial resources.
- **‘Multi-level governance’** involves the need to solve issues together as the challenges cannot be addressed single handedly by one player. Players from different government levels and sectors as well as the private sector and civil society need to come together.
- **‘Shared sense of direction’** requires a vision, objective or strategic plan to mobilise people and resources and create ownership. Beyond the common purpose, communication raises awareness among the wider public, facilitating cooperation and exchange among stakeholders as well as offering targeted information.

Source: Böhme et al. (2022)

### **3.3 Territorial Agenda support for territorial resilience**

Increasing uncertainties and the need for more resilience call for better territorial governance.

This makes the Territorial Agenda 2030 even more relevant. Firstly, it stresses the need to bring together a wide range of committed players around the aim of a future for all places in a just and green Europe. Cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders identified in the Territorial Agenda is essential to fully address growing inequalities and master the transitions ahead with:

- multi-level governance;
- place-based approaches;
- coordinated sector policy territorial impacts and coherence;
- cooperation between territories;
- territorial cohesion at European level;



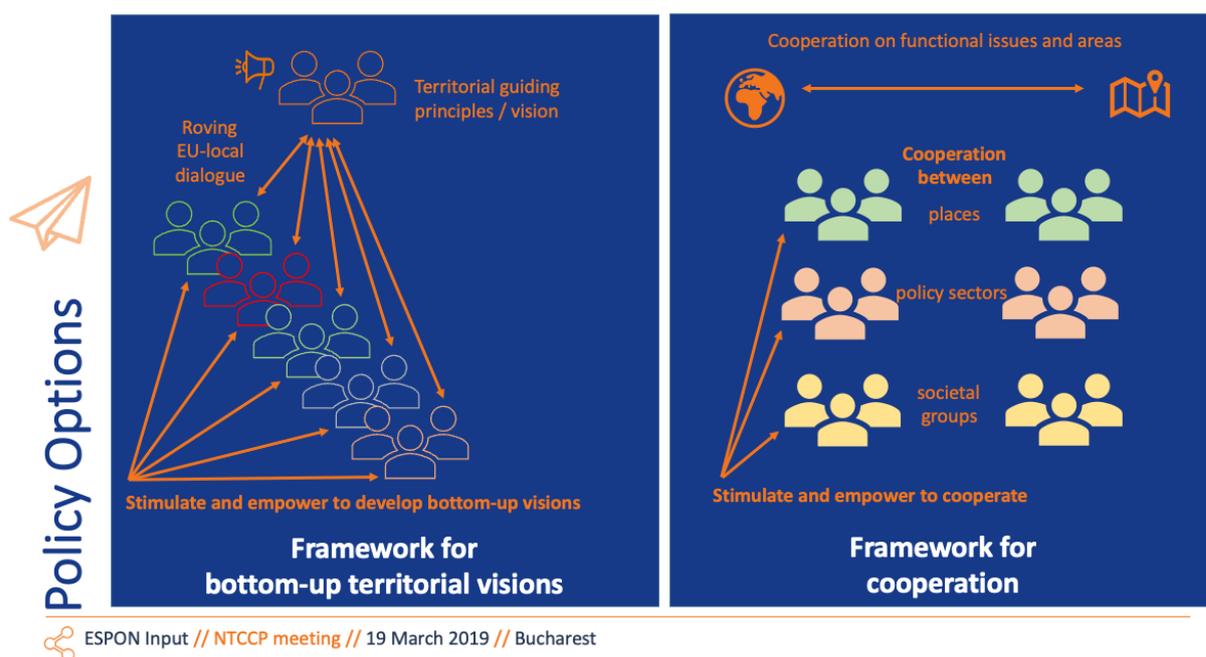
- territorial cohesion at cross-border, transnational, inter- and intra-regional levels; and
- Member State and neighbouring country contributions to territorial cohesion.

However, more emphasis will be needed to establish the Territorial Agenda as a platform and forum bringing together the players, mobilising them to increase resilience together and avoid increasing disparities between people and places.

The pilot actions are certainly a first step. However, they are probably too small scale and humble to achieve sizeable change. The Territorial Agenda needs to increase its outreach to become a more visible anchoring point for debates concerning territorial cohesion and the future. During the Finnish and Croatian EU Presidencies there were talks about an outreach (or PR) strategy for the Territorial Agenda. In the wake of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) various EU Presidencies organised EU-wide conferences on sector policies or policy objectives linked to territorial cohesion. These events brought players – beyond the usual suspects – together to discuss the need for a stronger territorial dimension and avoid increasing fragmentation and what we today call ‘geographies of discontent’ or ‘places left behind’. It would be worthwhile taking the ideas and initiatives up again.

Rather than discussing further updating objectives and modernising the Territorial Agenda as a document setting out objectives it should become a framework for action.

**Figure 2 Policy pathways – ESPON Territorial Reference Framework**



Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)

As already outlined in the ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019), in line with the objective to bring Europe closer to citizens and ensure that all places and parts of society (not just promising ones)



are heard, the Territorial Agenda could become a framework for diverse and multifaceted bottom-up visions. The objectives of such visions may even diverge from mainstream policy objectives such as growth, jobs and innovation.

Furthermore, cooperation is a key ingredient to increasing resilience and responding to uncertainty and challenges. Accordingly, the Territorial Agenda could become a framework for cooperation between places, sector policies and social groups. An important feature will be to stress the broad approach to cooperation at any geographical level, and not limit it to existing cooperation initiatives and programmes.

These two principle policy pathways (see Figure 2) have been translated into a number of policy options by the [ESPON Territorial Reference Framework](#) (2019). The high-flying policy options for a stronger territorial voice in Europe are shown in Figure 3. They have also been translated into short factsheets, which are still relevant today. The textboxes in the annex contain more detailed proposals from the ESPON Territorial Reference Framework, e.g. on:

- **Framework for a shared European vision.** Serious efforts are needed to inform national ministers in various relevant domains, members of the European Parliament (beyond the REGI Committee) and EU Commissioners about the Territorial Agenda 2030 and to engender support for wider visioning processes.
- **Territorial voice in European policy processes.** In the European debate territorial concerns have no particular voice, i.e. nobody that brings the territorial dimension into the policy debates at European level and even in the Member States. To ensure that the objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030 make it into larger policy debates, it needs to get an ‘advocate’.
- **Roving EU – local dialogue.** To achieve greater ownership among policy makers and greater awareness of their responsibility to consider all regions, their needs and assets, is needed to tackling fragmentation and give ‘places left behind’ a stronger role in policy making. This requires A European-wide campaign to pay visits to Europe’s cities and regions to discuss with them their needs and perceptions.
- **Cooperation as conditionality.** Making cooperation an essential feature of all future Cohesion Policy programmes will help to overcome functional mismatches and address interdependencies.

**Figure 3 High-flying policy options – ESPON Territorial Reference Framework**



Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)

The Territorial Agenda could be a reference framework providing a sense of direction and become more outspoken about the need for a shared vision for Europe. It could be turned into a framework for bottom-up visions showing the diversity of Europe, recognising all parts of society and territories and stimulating constructive thinking about future developments – with differing ideals and features. Such territorial visions could be developed in bottom-up processes involving broad sections of local society – following



the place-based approach. Instead of all visions pointing in one direction and just being variations of the same idea (e.g. the green and digital transition), they should advocate diversity where different places have different lifestyles or development objectives (e.g. post growth). The common dominator should be the framework provided by the Territorial Agenda, based on the policy-aims of a green and just future for all places.

To move from the Territorial Agenda as a 'European reference framework for bottom-up visions' to practice, requires wider thinking about the diversity of such visions as well as a process to stimulate this work effectively. Who should take the lead for developing visions? What stimulation would encourage people to develop such visions?

ESPON research provides some hints and ideas for possible answers to these questions. Territorial governance projects as well as targeted analysis studies contain a lot of food for thought in that direction. Still the answers actually concern policy making, setting priorities and defining the ambition and resources to put behind this. Such resources include both bargaining power, human resources in the administration and funding.



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## Annex: Proposals ESPON Territorial Reference Framework

 <span style="float: right;">Framework for a shared European vision</span>	
<b>What is the policy option about?</b>	Strengthening the territorial dimension in various sector policies and asking for more bottom-up territorial visions, will require a reference point outlining shared overall principles for the European territory. A shared vision for the (territorial) development of Europe that could be championed by leading players and discussed at Council meetings and by the European Parliament. Such a vision needs to be elaborated in a broad process taking on board diverse and multifaceted development perspectives at local and regional levels in Europe. A starting point could be the scenarios developed by the ESPON project on the Territorial Reference Framework.
<b>What action needs to be taken?</b>	<p>A serious effort needs to be undertaken to inform national ministers in various relevant domains, Members of the European Parliament (beyond the REGI Committee) and EU Commissioners about the Territorial Agenda post-2020 and to engender support for a wider visioning process.</p> <p>This action will require considerable efforts in convincing the new Commission and the Council of the need for such an overarching strategy and the importance the Territorial Agenda post-2020 could play for this e.g. in conjunction with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, a process needs to be set up on how to establish the Territorial Agenda post-2020 as the new guiding document at EU level.</p>
<b>Who takes the lead?</b>	First steps in that direction probably will require that the Directors General in charge of the Territorial Agenda post-2020 take the necessary steps to transmit the message towards other relevant players, e.g. the next Commission as soon as it is taking offices after the European elections and the German and Finish Council Presidencies.
<b>What are possible outcomes?</b>	Developing a shared vision for Europe, embracing the regions' diversities will eventually set the milestones for addressing fragmentation in Europe and have a reference point for uniting elements.
<b>Example</b>	
A German-Polish initiative <sup>1</sup> developed a joint vision for the border area. Such initiatives in all parts of Europe, be it at regional within countries or beyond national borders, could be at the heart of such a vision process. The process would be accompanied by overarching discussions by Members of the European Parliament, EU Commissioners, members of the Committee of the Regions and national ministries to discuss the core values of Europe and identify joint future pathways.	
<b>Ideas for experimental actions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⇒ Take as starting point the Territorial Agenda post-2020 and adjust it to future aspirations.</li> <li>⇒ Set up a public consultation to identify focus points of a future European vision.</li> </ul>	

Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.kooperation-ohne-grenzen.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GZK-Flyer\\_en.pdf](https://www.kooperation-ohne-grenzen.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/GZK-Flyer_en.pdf)



## Territorial voice in European policy processes

<b>What is the policy option about?</b>	<p>In the European debate territorial concerns have no particular voice, i.e. no body that brings the territorial dimension into the policy debates at European level and even in the Member States. To ensure that the objectives of the Territorial Agenda post-2020 make it into larger policy debates, it needs to get an 'advocate'. This could be an institution or a person, i.e. somebody like Brundtland as advocate of territorial cohesion.</p> <p>At a more technical level, the advocacy could also be helped by checking all future European policies against their impact concerning the key challenges. This could e.g. be part of an expanded territorial section in the Commission's Impact Assessment.</p>
<b>What action needs to be taken?</b>	<p>The NTCCP need to discuss how the voice of the territorial dimension in general policy debates can be strengthened and which arrangements are possible to empower somebody to take on the role of the 'territorial voice in Europe'.</p> <p>The Commission, supported by ESPON, can revisit the territorial section in the Commission's Impact Assessment and see how this can be further strengthened to also address the key challenges.</p>
<b>Who takes the lead?</b>	<p>The NTCCP maybe in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions can take the lead to launch a discussion about a future 'territorial voice in Europe'.</p> <p>The Commission can take the lead for revisiting the territorial section in the Commission's Impact Assessment.</p>
<b>What are possible outcomes?</b>	<p>Such an approach would give help to fight the territorial fragmentation in Europe and bring a broader understanding about territorial interdependencies to policy making.</p>

### Example

The Committee of the Regions and the European Commission services make frequent use of the ESPON Territorial Impact Assessment. In doing so, it continuously raises the voice in the name of the territorial dimension and increases the awareness of territorial implications in a wide range of policy areas. In the first years of ESPON, a key policy recommendation was to include some territorial questions in the Commission's Impact Assessment, which any new policy initiative needs to pass. After several years of advocating this recommendation it has been heard and the Commission's Impact Assessment was amended.

### Ideas for experimental actions

- ⇒ Initiate an Impact Assessment of EU policies against key challenges (territorial fragmentation; territorial interdependencies and mismatch of functionalities).
- ⇒ Discuss with selected EU sector policies in how far the TA 2020+ is relevant for them and how they contribute to tackling the three identified key challenges.
- ⇒ Charge a freestanding body with raising the 'territorial voice' in European policy processes, i.e. make clear statements about the territorial dimension and implications in ongoing policy debates.

Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)



## Roving EU – local dialogue

<b>What is the policy option about?</b>	Members of the European Parliament and (high-level) staff of the European Commission could take literally the demand for a Europe that is closer to the citizens, and pay visits to Europe's cities and regions to discuss with them their needs and perceptions.
<b>What action needs to be taken?</b>	A considerable effort is needed to set up a European-wide campaign where high level representatives meet citizens and representatives from local and regional authorities usually not present in European debates. This needs to be coordinated with relevant ministries in the Member States and primarily includes visits to 'places left behind'. The Committee of the Regions could also act as intermediary in such a process, in connection with domestic organisations who play a role in supporting the EU 'voice' of different societal groups.
<b>Who takes the lead?</b>	The key player in charge of setting up such a roving public hearing debate needs to be identified. This could be the Secretary General of the new Commission, the head of the new European Parliament or even the President of the Committee of Regions.
<b>What are possible outcomes?</b>	Greater ownership among EU policy makers and greater awareness of their responsibility to consider all regions, their needs and assets, can contribute to tackling fragmentation and give 'places left behind' a stronger role in policy making.

### Example

The 'Cohesion Alliance' of the Committee of the Regions is a strong cooperation initiative across all levels, of cities, regions, the Committee of the Regions, and representatives of the civil society that lobbies for a strong cohesion policy post-2020. A European tour of EU officials around places in Europe that are most challenged by fragmentation would need a similar, probably even higher, commitment by players at different levels.

### Ideas for experimental actions

- ⇒ Identify places that are / feel 'left-behind' where to organise dialogue meetings.
- ⇒ Set up an interinstitutional alliance to run dialogue meetings.
- ⇒ Invite EU officials to tour around these places and engage in dialogues bridging local and European concerns and visions.

Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)



## Cooperation as conditionality

<b>What is the policy option about?</b>	Cooperation in different forms and types will be a prerequisite for all EU policies in future. In principle cooperation should be a conditionality for EU funding. Every ESIF programme (not only Interreg) should have a clear approach to foster cooperation between places, sectors and societal groups. Every Managing Authority authorities should identify a set of measures to be implemented through cooperation actions in their programme area as well as actions where players in the programme area cooperate with players outside the programme area.
<b>What action needs to be taken?</b>	The regulatory framework for Cohesion Policy post-2020 should make it mandatory for programmes to support cooperation actions. The Council working groups and the Commission services need to agree on the necessary changes in the regulatory framework.
<b>Who takes the lead?</b>	The NTCCP and Directors General can take corresponding measures to convince colleagues in charge of the negotiations of the regulatory framework, to make cooperation an essential feature. This concerns cooperation between places, cooperation between sectors and cooperation between groups of societies within a programme area as well as between programme areas.
<b>What are possible outcomes?</b>	Making cooperation an essential feature of all ESIF programmes will help to overcome functional mismatches and address interdependencies.

### Example

Interreg is a prime example of making cooperation a conditionality for funding. Also in mainstream ESIF programmes cooperation can and has been addressed. Examples range from CLLD and ITI to the cooperation arrangements linked to macro-regional strategies.

### Ideas for experimental actions

- ⇒ Set out guidelines for ESIF programmes on how support and benefit from cooperation between places, sectors and groups of society.
- ⇒ Identify good practices where ESIF programmes and actions involved a clear cooperation dimension within the programme area as well as beyond the programme area.

Source: ESPON Territorial Reference Framework (2019)