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Stocktaking Review of the Territorial Agenda 2030

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Introduction

In times of increasing uncertainty and the risk of growing economic, social and territorial disparities and discontent, territorial cohesion is more important than ever to ensure a sustainable future for all places and all people. Without it, Europe risks growing fragmentation and disintegration. The Territorial Agenda 2030 provides a policy framework for strengthening spatial planning and territorial cohesion. It translates the abstract policy goal of territorial cohesion into the easier to communicate idea of a 'future for all places'.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 is an intergovernmental policy document aiming at 'reducing inequalities between people and between places' and 'ensuring a future for all places and people in Europe', and underlines that competitiveness and cohesion objectives are mutual supporting each other. Adopted by the ministers responsible for spatial planning, territorial development and/or territorial cohesion in December 2020, the Territorial Agenda works through an intergovernmental process and sets out to enhance the territorial dimension of all polices at all levels. The Territorial Agenda 2030 is a guiding document for future development, as well as for EU Cohesion Policy, functioning as the operationalisation of the territorial cohesion objective. Focusing on a green and just future for all places, it underlines the importance of strategic spatial planning, and emphasises the importances of a territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels, which is even more necessary in times of increasing disparities.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 is an intergovernmental declaration with no direct legal, financial or institutional implementation instruments. Rather than implementation, it talks about application and calls on a wide range of players to voluntarily consider and apply its objectives and priorities.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 (see paragraph 84) calls for a stocktaking in 2024, including reviews of the governance system, implementation progress and relevance of the priorities. This stocktaking shall feed into the positioning of the Territorial Agenda in the preparation of Cohesion Policy post 2027 and a possible renewal of the Territorial Agenda, to be decided on in 2025.

Against this background, ESPON and Interact have been tasked to launch a review of the Territorial Agenda 2030, and to provide background information and analysis for the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points (NTCCP) and the Directors-General responsible for Territorial Cohesion (DGTC) to assess the progress of the Territorial Agenda application and decide on next steps. This study offers a comprehensive and critical analysis of the governance, implementation and communication of the Territorial Agenda and provides recommendations and advice on how to **(**a) increase its effectiveness, (b) develop it into a robust, flexible and adequate framework for future actions on territorial cohesion, and (c) help contribute to a stronger territorial dimension of EU policy making post 2027.

This is the Final Report of the study which serves also as input to the DGTC meeting on 26 November 2024. It provides an overview of the state of play of the review (see chapter 1) and ideas to strengthen application of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and prepare the next Territorial Agenda (see chapter 2). The annex contains more details and results of the document studies and surveys (see chapter 3).

1 Key observations

The Territorial Agenda 2030 review supports the NTCCP in its work. The NTCCP is not just the recipient of the study, its members are also the most important players driving dissemination and application of the Territorial Agenda.

A review of academic and policy documents referring to the Territorial Agenda 2030 (see sections 3.1 and 3.2), a survey on the uptake of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and a survey on experience with Territorial Agenda pilot actions (see sections 3.3 and. 3.4), as well as interviews and workshops (see section 3.5) assess the use and usefulness of the Territorial Agenda. Resultant insights include how the Territorial Agenda has been translated into practice (see section 1.1), its added value (see section 1.2), current trends and policy changes that affect its relevance (see section 1.3) as well as how governance and implementation function in practice (see section 1.4).

The review of application of the Territorial Agenda 2030 looks at the principles and priorities advocated in the document.

Table 1.1 Territorial Agenda 2030 principles & priorities

Principles	Priorities
Place-based approaches • Territorial Impact Assessments (TIAs) • Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) / LEADER • Europe Closer to Citizens (PO5) • Regional & local specificities	**A just Europe** • Balanced Europe • Functional regions • Integration beyond borders
Stakeholder involvement • Cross-sector • Cross-level • Cross-borders • Stakeholder capacities	**A green Europe** • Healthy environment • Circular economy • Sustainable connections

Key observations gained include:

- **The priorities and principles in the Territorial Agenda are valid** and used across administrative levels and policy domains in the EU and neighbouring countries involved in the Territorial Agenda collaboration. Use has increased since adoption of Territorial Agenda in December 2020, though remains patchy.

- **The use of Territorial Agenda principles and priorities is often not visible**, as no direct references are made to the document. It is used as a general framework and source of inspiration or has been translated into national policies to which people then refer. This is also because the Territorial Agenda principles and priorities generally reflect a broad consensus that exists among European policy makers on what should be done to enhance the territorial dimension of policies at all levels.

- **Stakeholder involvement principles widely applied.** The principles underpinning the Territorial Agenda 2030 are more important in the long run than the priorities and deserve more attention. Vertical and horizontal cooperation even increased over the last three years, according to the

survey responses. Cross-border integration has been less pronounced (also because of the impact of the COVID pandemic) but Interreg programmes make more references to the Territorial Agenda 2030 than regional or national ERDF programmes.

- **Local needs and characteristics widely considered.** The territoriality and individual needs of places and regions are taken into account in the daily work of survey respondents which highlights the relevance of Territorial Agenda 2030 principles and place-based approaches. Nevertheless, Cohesion Policy could be used more to strengthen the territorial dimension of policies.

- **Territorial Agenda 2030 themes still relevant.** These themes reflect overarching EU policies with a strong territorial focus. They are still spot on. Though thematic adjustments to more recent developments and policy priorities would be possible, they are not strictly needed.

- **The pilot actions are appreciated as low-level policy labs.** Participants see their main benefits in learning about the content, networking and project planning. The pilot actions do not generate transformative or upscalable results.

- **Twofold mandate and added value: capacity building and point of reference.** The Territorial Agenda reflects primarily the broad consensus among member states in terms of territorial approaches and has a twofold mandate and added value. It provides inspiration and a learning document for those involved in territorial policies, and is a reference in discussions with other policies to raise awareness about the territorial dimension.

- **There is a need to engage more with stakeholders from other sectors and governance levels**. In some countries and at EU level, considerable efforts are made to use and apply the Territorial Agenda. However, in addition to individual players doing this independently, joint action would increase the policy outreach, in particular to other (EU) policies. It might also boil down to a choice between broader engagement (more sectors) and deeper engagement (more consistently in some policy domains).

- **The Territorial Agenda has substantial room to improve its governance structures**, with continuity in advocating for a stronger territorial dimension in EU policies. There is a need to focus on transformative and visible actions. This concerns both pilot actions, applications of the Territorial Agenda in the EU and national policy as well as interaction with other sector policies.

- **The Territorial Agenda needs more ownership** among its key players (mainly the DGTC, NTCCP and TAWG), to strengthen dissemination and application as well as engagement with ongoing EU policy agendas.

1.1 Strand 1 – Translation of the Territorial Agenda into practice

In the best of all worlds, application of the Territorial Agenda would be visible through many references in policy and planning documents at various levels and academic papers clearly proving its use and translation into practice.

The Territorial Agenda needs to fit the governance and planning systems and culture of all EU member and partner states, such as Switzerland and Norway, and stay in the remit of the ministries which adopted it. This implies that it needs to be broad and open to interpretation and adjustments, without being prescriptive. This makes it difficult to trace formulations in policy documents and plans from the local to the European level are influenced by the Territorial Agenda. Direct references are limited, but a wide range of documents are in line with the objectives of a just and green Europe. Whether that is thanks to the Territorial Agenda, or merely confirmation that its principles and priorities were already the broad consensus at the time of its adoption will remain open, as the causalities are impossible to trace in most cases. This is not a major issue, as long as developments point towards more harmonious spatial development with a sustainable future for all places and people in Europe, along with stronger

place-based approaches and territorial awareness of sector policies. The Territorial Agenda follows a soft policy approach working through discursive integration and network governance positively influencing policymaking and spatial planning cultures.

In academic literature, the Territorial Agenda 2030 has not been a very popular research topic. A limited number of papers critically analyse the Territorial Agenda 2030, as a comprehensive policy approach or for its contribution to significant EU goals, such as a Just Europe, or policy ambitions.

Research on the Territorial Agenda 2030 is firmly entrenched within the spatial domain. Nevertheless, there are indications of its potential influence on policymaking or, at the very least, research beyond its primary sphere of influence. The scientific discourse on the Territorial Agenda 2030 is dominated by spatial imbalances. The Territorial Agenda 2030 has reformulated this into the concept of 'spatial justice' or 'socio-territorial cohesion' by bringing together places and societal groups. It offers the idea of a desirable 'future for all places' as a more communicable interpretation of territorial cohesion.

The research about the Territorial Agenda 2030 offers a shift to attention on Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation, particularly with territorial cohesion and other spatially sensitive policies and actions. The main hindrance to widespread implementation lies in the very general and imprecise nature of key concepts in the Territorial Agenda 2030. There are few suggestions on improving implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. With few exceptions, they are general and offer few genuine breakthroughs. They mainly rely on soft actions, though there is a 'hidden' sentiment towards better alignment between the member-state-driven Territorial Agenda 2030 process and EU and national policymaking (fund distribution).

The Territorial Agenda 2030 is broadly mentioned in policy documents in the fields of Cohesion Policy, rural and territorial development, urban policy and European territorial development cooperation. References to the Territorial Agenda 2030 can be found in guidance, opinions, input papers, working documents, reports, position papers, communications, policy statements, Operational Programmes, strategies, action plans and Partnership Agreements.

There is almost no mention of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in other policy fields such as transport or the environment, even though sustainable urban mobility plans at the level of functional urban areas and TEN-T corridors are clear examples of a territorial approach in transport policy. The number of documents found (47) is limited compared to the multiple Commission documents, 27 Partnership Agreements and hundreds of programmes, strategies and spatial plans where it could have been referenced.

Referencing is haphazard. The Territorial Agenda 2030 is for example mentioned in Commission documents referring to rural policy, but not Cohesion Policy. At member state level the Territorial Agenda 2030 is mentioned in some Partnership Agreements, but not in CAP plans.

Even though more documents were found in some countries there is little evidence that impact of the Territorial Agenda 2030 was systematic. For example, member states that referenced the Territorial Agenda 2030 in their Partnership Agreements or national guidance documents did not do so in regional operational programmes. Likewise, Czech or Greek programmes or strategies do not mention the Territorial Agenda 2030 referenced in their national guidance. An exception might be Romania where all Romanian Interreg programmes mention the Territorial Agenda 2030.

In the vast majority of documents, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is mentioned as a framework or source of inspiration similar to the New Leipzig Charter. These two documents try to help stakeholders with implementation of territorial principles and priorities. It might have had an impact on Interreg programmes where several reference the Territorial Agenda 2030. The same applies for the EU macroregional strategies and transnational spatial visions such as VASAB. Another group of documents calls for stronger links between the Territorial Agenda 2030 and Cohesion Policy.

The picture is likely not complete. Some policy documents will be revised in the coming years and could reference the Territorial Agenda 2030. In addition, some documents are clearly inspired by the principles and priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 but do not mention it explicitly.

An essential aspect of Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation is the adoption of place-based strategies and methodologies, emphasising distinct regional and local attributes and responding to evolving needs. Survey results (see Annex section 3.3 for more detail) indicate that territorial approaches and tool use have generally increased or remained stable over the past three years, although CLLD/LEADER, once considered promising, has declined.

Responses to stakeholder involvement questions of the survey highlight that enhanced collaboration between administrative levels and policy sectors is a key focus. Stakeholder involvement is primarily reflected through cooperation across sectors and administrative levels, with cross-border cooperation being less prominent.

For the Territorial Agenda priorities, the just and green transitions are important in respondents' work. The slight decrease in thematic priorities was most significant in cross-border integration. This may be partly due to limited responses from representatives of cooperation instruments or programmes. Nevertheless, EU efforts towards improving cross-border cooperation and reducing its obstacles are taking a swing.[1] Lastly, while the Territorial Agenda 2030 remains a reference document for respondents, more effort is needed in its communication to increase awareness among key players of territorial relevant policies and spatial planners at all levels of governance.

Raising awareness and implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030 face challenges due to its complexity, low visibility and competition with other policy priorities which make it difficult for stakeholders to fully grasp and prioritise it. The non-binding nature, limited cooperation between national institutions, differing political priorities and local legal obstacles further hinder implementation and integration of the agenda. Still, reviewing not just the Territorial Agenda 2030 as single document, but considering the full policy process there are considerable achievements, worthwhile recalling (see textbox on forgotten achievements).

Pilot action have been put in place since 2020. They demonstrate, test and develop practices which contribute to Territorial Agenda priorities (see textbox on pilot actions). In April 2022, a policy lab was organised jointly by the French Presidency and ESPON. This led to the adoption of Do's and Don'ts[2]. This is a living document, that may accompany implementation of current and future pilot actions. It provides guiding principles including how to establish a robust platform for pilot actions based on clearly defined common objectives and benefits for stakeholders, realistic assessments of resource needs, strategies that can adapt to unforeseen events and communication of outputs.

The Territorial Agenda is not evenly applied or widely referenced in policy documents though its principles and priorities are used across different levels of governance. The interviews and workshops continuously emphasised that the principles and priorities are translated into national policy as they are generally accepted among policy makers. In other words, Territorial Agenda principles and priorities are often tacitly applied already and thus not explicitly mentioned. This is also linked to Europe's territorial, administrative and governance diversity. It requires adaptation and translation of the Territorial Agenda into the respective context with no one-size-fits-all solutions. In addition,

[1] Council of the European Union, 'Amended Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Mechanism to Resolve Legal and Administrative Obstacles in a Cross-Border Context - Mandate for Negotiations with the European Parliament', 2024.

[2] See https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/1-page-DO-and-Donts.pdf

earmarked funding to apply the Territorial Agenda was raised on several occasions. We come back to this in section 1.4.

Pilot actions

The Territorial Agenda 2030 also introduced the idea of pilot actions.[3] There was a long debate about how formal the approach to pilot actions should be and whether they could be linked to EU funding sources. In 2022, the decision was made to experiment with a very open and flexible approach, open to all interested parties with very low entrance barriers. The document studies, surveys, interviews and group discussions highlight that:

- **Pilot projects are small policy labs** appreciated by the participants. Pilot actions are promising starting points, but have not yet fully lived up to expectations. They have no considerable scalable effects.
- **Low-level entrance barriers are very much appreciated** enabling smaller bodies (e.g. small municipalities) to engage without feeling overburdened by administrative procedures and commitments.
- **A lack of funding** is frequently raised, as it is difficult to initiate or engage in pilot actions using just own resources for many players. Notwithstanding that the ESPON 2030 Programme offers funding opportunities to support pilot actions, some interviewees stressed that they could also apply for funding under Interreg. Several Interreg programmes refer to the Territorial Agenda and fund relevant projects. Furthermore, the EIB offers funding for scalable actions that can be supported through advisory services to ensure effective application of the territorial approach.
- **Comparisons with Urban Agenda pilot actions are mixed**. Some people stress the advantage of Urban Agenda pilot actions being more structured, covering almost all countries, and receiving funding. Other people say Urban Agenda pilot actions are too heavy on administration and Territorial Agenda pilot actions are more suitable with their flexibility and experimental character.
- **Better use of pilot action results could be possible**. The lessons from pilot actions are often seen in closing events and/or publications which are also available at www.territorialagenda.eu. However, too little is done to disseminate and discuss the results in a more systematic way beyond single pilot actions. Strategies for promoting pilot action results, upscaling findings and cross-learning are missing.
- **An unclear application process** has been highlighted by a number of discussants. At present NTCCP members can present possible pilot projects to the NTCCP. However, it is not clear how this process works, or whether potential pilot project consortia outside the NTCCP can be acknowledged. Would it make sense to reconsider an application process or online form discussed during the Finnish Presidency in 2019?
- **Added value of pilot actions are mainly networking and learning.** Survey respondents stressed two key takeaways, pilot actions contributed to a better understanding of local territorial needs and the networking benefits (see annex section 3.4 for more details).

The Territorial Agenda is an overarching strategic policy document. There have been many discussions about its target groups, as it is partly perceived as too technical and / or abstract for lower governance levels, though it is exactly these levels it should eventually reach. Although regional and local

[3] See https://territorialagenda.eu/pilot-actions/

authorities implement Territorial Agenda principles in their daily work, stronger coordination between difference governance levels is needed to ensure these principles are aligned and shared throughout, but also passed on to citizens. This we return to in section 1.2.

Forgotten achievements

Tangible achievements of a policy are good to showcase. However, the Territorial Agenda is an ambiguous policy exercising its influence through discursive integration and network governance which limits achievements to examples and storytelling. Even the Territorial Agenda pilot actions, introduced in 2020, are unlikely to change that.

The Territorial Agenda is not a single document, but a long-term process of strengthening the territorial dimension of policy making in Europe, which started with the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP). In this perspective, some key achievements are worthwhile recalling and reconnecting to:

- **Transnational territorial cooperation.** The Interreg strand on transnational cooperation was introduced to strengthen the territorial dimension of cooperation and policy making. This was rooted in debates on the ESDP and the first transnational Interreg programmes emphasised the development of spatial visions and strategies for their programme areas. Over time, the focus of transnational cooperation took a more sectoral approach and became more aligned with the thematic objectives of Cohesion Policy.[4]

- **ESPON.** In the early 2000s ESPON was set up as an Interreg programme to support policy making with European territorial evidence. In the late 2010s, ESPON started supporting the rotating Presidencies of the Council of the EU in revising the Territorial Agenda 2020. Since the approval of the Territorial Agenda 2030, together with its priorities (Just and Green Europe) and supporting its implementation (pilot actions) and their dissemination have become key among the priorities of the ESPON Programme.

- **Territorial Impact Assessments (TIAs).** Under ESPON, TIAs for sector policies were developed and tested. Today these are part of many EU policy debates. In particular the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has conducted many participatory TIAs of EU policies – mostly in collaboration with ESPON.

- **Cohesion Policy territorial tools.** The introduction of integrated territorial tools, territorial strategies and integrated territorial investments (ITI) in Cohesion Policy, is also inspired by the Territorial Agenda processes. Today they all come together in CPR Chapter II on territorial development.

In the interviews, survey and workshops, ideas to strengthen the application of the Territorial Agenda were mentioned. They include:

- **Make application of the Territorial Agenda more visible.** This includes increasing information about the Territorial Agenda, while strengthening Territorial Agenda applications and pilot projects in cooperation with other sector policies and across governance levels. Communication of the Territorial Agenda process, priorities and actions needs to be strengthened.

- **A stronger place-based approach in Cohesion Policy.** This could be through TIAs of programmes, integrating territorial principle in future Common Provision Regulations (CPR), a CPR

[4] There are ongoing efforts to refocus on intangible obstacles to cross-border cooperation with B-Solutions, such as legal differences or lack of policy coordination.

annex on the territorial approach, better links between sector policies, territorial tools and the place-based approach.

- **An EU White Paper on Territorial Cohesion.** In 2008, the European Commission published a Green Paper on territorial cohesion.[5] Back then, there were expectations of a follow up White Paper, however this never happened. Such a White Paper would underline the importance of the territorial dimension in increasing competitiveness and supporting the green, digital and demographic transitions in the EU, but also of cohesion, highlighting that the lack of cohesion may negatively affect the functioning of the EU Single Market and competitiveness itself. Being a Commission initiative, an EU White Paper would complement the intergovernmental Territorial Agenda process.

Takeaway messages

- Territorial Agenda priorities and principles are widely used across the EU, administrative levels and policy domains. Their use has increased since adoption of Territorial Agenda in December 2020, though application remains patchy.
- The use of Territorial Agenda principles and priorities is often invisible, with no direct references to the document. Often it is a general framework and source of inspiration, or has been translated into national policy documents to which people then refer.
- The pilot actions are appreciated as low-level policy labs. Participants see the main benefits as learning about the content, networking and project planning. The pilot actions do not generate transformative or scalable results.
- More could be done to strengthen the application of the Territorial Agenda and increase its visibility.

1.2 Strand 2 – Added value of the Territorial Agenda

The EU needs a strong territorial perspective to ensure cohesion in light of forthcoming challenges. The Territorial Agenda could add significant value. However, its application approach does not fully enable the use of this potential.

In this respect the added value of the Territorial Agenda is twofold:

- **General reference framework.** Application of the Territorial Agenda relies on informal multilevel cooperation, where key players are asked to apply the Territorial Agenda in the context of their regular mandate. The document review, survey and interviews have shown there is some uptake of the Territorial Agenda in policy documents and by players from the local to the EU levels. This is however limited and does not match the importance of a stronger territorial dimension in policy making stressed by the Territorial Agenda.

  Some interviewees highlighted the importance of the Territorial Agenda as a reference document when underlining the need to strengthen the territorial dimension in policy design or implementation. An official document adopted by ministers is valuable in discussions with other policies, in different domains or at different levels of governance.

[5] See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2008/green-paper-on-territorial-cohesion-turning-territorial-diversity-into-strength

- **'Internal' reference document.** The added value of the Territorial Agenda goes beyond its potential as a reference document for spreading the word to policy processes. The interviews and workshop sessions highlighted that the Territorial Agenda is also an internal reference document and source for reflection and learning within organisations involved in the NTCCP. This includes spatial planning and overarching development strategies and policies.

The main added value the Territorial Agenda offers to policy debates concerns the principles of a territorial approach. Many discussions underlined the principles and general rationale for a stronger territorial approach are more central than the details of thematic priorities. Other reference documents provide more detailed guidance on the thematic priorities, but there is a lack of European reference documents concerning the territorial and place-based dimension.

The interviews and group discussions suggest the added value of the Territorial Agenda could be increased through more transformative and visible actions. This concerns both pilot actions, application of the Territorial Agenda in EU and national policies and interaction with other sector policies.

Takeaway messages

- The Territorial Agenda has a twofold mandate and added value. It is an inspiration and a learning document for those involved in territorial policies, and a reference document in discussions with other policies to raise awareness about the territorial dimension.
- Awareness of the Territorial Agenda could be better, even among players applying the principles and priorities. This is partly due to the implicit communication, as the Territorial Agenda principles are already often implicitly present in national planning documents, and partly due to patchy communication, which should be strengthened.
- Application mainly emphasises territorial principles rather than detailed priorities. Therefore, could be improved by making the principles more explicit.

1.3 Strand 3 – Trends and changes

We live in times of change, transition and uncertainties. Since the launch of the Territorial Agenda 2030 the world has seen the COVID-19 pandemic, migration and energy crises in the wake of Russia's war on Ukraine, geopolitical and security crises, climate and biodiversity crises. These have increased the economic, unemployment and cost of living challenges, inequalities, GDP disparities, regions in development traps, as well as demographic, twin transition and the low institutional capacity challenges.

In addition, the need to increase competitiveness stressed by Ursula von der Leyen in her speech on the priorities for 2024-2029[6], requires the economy firing on all cylinders and exploiting the potential of all places.[7] This is also linked to the idea of a 'freedom to stay' launched by Enrico Letta[8], emphasising

[6] Ursula von der Leyen, 'Europe's Choice. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029', 2024 <https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf>.

7 European Commission, Forging a Sustainable Future Together. Cohesion for a Competitive and Inclusive Europe: Report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy (Publications Office of the European Union, 2024) <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/974536> [accessed 14 August 2024].

[8] Enrico Letta, *Much More than a Market. Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to Deliver a Sustainable Future and Prosperity for All EU Citizens* (European Commission, 2024) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>.

the necessity for the European Single Market to evolve in a manner that benefits all European citizens, not just those who are mobile or businesses that operate transnationally.

The latest crises, current mega-trends and transition challenges risk increasing fragmentations between places and people, which makes the territorial perspective even more important. Future trends are likely to exacerbate spatial and societal fragmentation, interdependencies and policy mismatches. The trends could increase 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.

In that sense, the Territorial Agenda's call for a future for all places and people is more relevant than ever. The question is whether it requires a new Territorial Agenda to better respond to the changing world. The analysis, interviews and discussions offer the following considerations:

- **The principles of the Territorial Agenda are spot on.** Also the priorities are still relevant, although they could be adjusted, adding elements such as energy security and defence. However, more emphasis on principles rather than priorities would mean no changes are required.

- **Anticipating policy opportunities is crucial**. The message of the added value of territorial principles should be brought into policy debates at the right moment. One such policy opportunity is the discussion on Cohesion Policy post-2027 and the next Multi-annual Financial Framework taking place in 2025 (see also section 2.3).

- **There is a need to create new political momentum.** A communique adopted at a ministerial meeting – restating the agreed principles of the Territorial Agenda 2030 - would provide renewed momentum to the process and generate external attention, rather than preparing another revision of the existing document (see also section 2.4). The current Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA2030, adopted in 2020) is a revised version of the previous Territorial Agenda 2011 (TA2020, adopted in 2011), which in turn was an update of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (TAEU, adopted in 2007).

- **A revision process binds substantial resources.** This could drain capacity needed to strengthen the application and dissemination of the Territorial Agenda. Too little is done to communicate and implement the Territorial Agenda as outlined in a report to the Swedish EU Presidency.[9] A new emphasis on advocating and communicating the Territorial Agenda is particularly relevant in light of the new EU Commission and the ongoing debate on EU priorities and financial allocations after 2027.

Looking towards a more ambitions Territorial Agenda, which strengthens the emphasis on territorial principles and offers a new discussion on key priorities, is a medium to long-term engagement. As the current Territorial Agenda is – despite the changing circumstances – still applicable, the best way forward might be to debate the focus of a new Territorial Agenda while putting more efforts on advocating and disseminating the current version. Such a dual strategy could result in a completely new and more powerful Territorial Agenda without easing efforts on applying the current one (see also section 2.4).

[9] Kai Böhme, *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* (Swedish EU Presidency, 2023) <https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/Kai_TA2030NewTrends_230503.pdf> [accessed 18 August 2023].

Takeaway messages

- The Territorial Agenda 2030 is still spot on. Though thematic adjustments to more recent developments and policy priorities are possible, they are not strictly needed.
- A communique adopted at a ministerial meeting on the current Territorial Agenda should reaffirm the critical importance of its territorial principles for ongoing policy debates rather than incorporate a new round of adjustments. This takes considerable resources and should be envisaged as a longer-term ambition which, however, needs to be launched soon.
- As Territorial Agenda 2030 is still valid, more emphasis should be given to further applying, communicating and advocating it.

1.4 Strand 4 – Governance and implementation

The intergovernmental character of Territorial Agenda process is the charm of its policy documents and maybe its biggest potential and hindrance. Since the launch of ESDP in 1999, it became clear that this is a policy carried by cooperation between national ministries. This has been reemphasised in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union of 2007, the Territorial Agenda 2020 adopted in 2011 and the current Territorial Agenda 2030 agreed on in 2020. They all are developed and governed by European intergovernmental cooperation on territorial cohesion. This includes NTCCPs and DGTC.

The intergovernmental focus implies there are no direct implementation tools, funding or legal implications linked to policy. Indeed, they are a manifestation of a common understanding and a reference point which everyone is asked to promote and apply where and when appropriate.

Considering the various facets of the work with all these documents, it is amazing to see how much work, energy, ownership and personal engagement some national representatives put into this work. These people are very clearly the backbone of the Territorial Agenda. At the same time, for others the Territorial Agenda implies the obligation to attend European meetings on seemingly obscure matters. Overall, the emphasis on the Territorial Agenda depends on the ambitions and resources of each EU Presidency. While some make considerable efforts to organise meetings and accelerate policy processes or dissemination, others merely organise the usual NTCCP and DGTC meetings. With several 'caretaker Presidencies', the momentum behind Territorial Agenda debates and processes slows considerably.

ESPON has been important in supporting the Territorial Agenda throughout each of the Presidencies of the Council of the EU. Initially, this was only through studies and evidence collection on territorial priorities for each Presidency and hosting www.territorialagenda.eu. ESPON is not comparable to the Urban Agenda back-office and there is much more work for the EU Presidencies. However, the new ESPON 2030 Programme is fully aligned with the objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and offers an administrative and financial framework to support its implementation 2030 in its various dimensions (pilot actions, peer-learning and capacity building, communication).[10]

The Territorial Agenda governance needs more power and communication to spread the message and engage with potential users beyond the usual suspects. For this it needs more ownership among key players – including DGTC and NTCCP members – and better links to EU policy agendas.

[10] Also, ESPON is embedded in Cohesion Policy and shall contribute to its main goals and its effectiveness (ETC Regulation, recital 10), while also supporting the implementation of the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 [...] A part of the ESPON deliverables will feed the process of Cohesion Policy and implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030" (source: https://archive.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/approved-espon-2030-programme.pdf).

- **Keeping momentum and ensuring continuity.** An important element is to ensure continuous engagement and activity, even with EU Presidencies dedicating minimum attention and resources to Territorial Agenda processes. Suggestions include:

    - **Territorial Agenda back-office.** In the run up to the approval of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in 2019, the possibility of a back-office support to the EU Presidencies was proposed but not implemented. A back-office would facilitate implementation and governance as well as maintain momentum. It would provide support without executive powers, which will remain at the level of the Member States and the intergovernmental process. Tasks could include supporting implementation of the Territorial Agenda by sharing territorial knowledge, communicating the agenda, monitoring progress, maintaining the website, supervising pilot projects, proposing measures to enhance implementation, etc. (Some more ideas concerning a possible back-office are presented in annex section 3.6.)

    - **Regular ministerial meetings.** They help to ensure the Territorial Agenda is regularly (every couple of years) on the agenda of ministerial meetings. This maintains political momentum and requires work to ensure there is something meaningful for the ministerial meeting to discuss. A first step would be to ask the Polish EU Presidency to link the Territorial Agenda to the debate on the future of Cohesion Policy in the agenda for the ministerial meeting.

    - **Pro-active stakeholder engagement.** More proactively engage with stakeholders and strengthen the territorial dimension in policies at all levels of governance. At present, the Territorial Agenda in section IV tasks individual key players with this. There are considerable efforts in some countries and at EU level. However, in addition to individual players working independently, the NTCCP might consider joint action to increase policy outreach. Ideas include inviting EU and/or national representatives to NTCCP meetings to discuss the territorial dimension of their policies, and arranging thematic workshops or conferences with representatives of relevant policies.

- **Link to existing funding.** The question of funding for the application of the Territorial Agenda is raised frequently. Various activities require funding which could come from existing sources (primarily, but not exclusively, ESPON). The NTCCP could strengthen links to these funding sources and provide information on them:

    - **Pilot actions.** A frequent concern is funding for pilot actions. As outlined above, ESPON offers funding possibilities that have been activated for some of the first pilot actions. However, other Interreg programmes fund projects and provide seed money for small scale projects which could also include pilot actions. Beyond the ESPON support, the NTCCP could communicate this more clearly and advocate the development of pilot action applications for Interreg funding. The transnational cooperation strand was initiated by the predecessor of the NTCCP and had strong links to territorial development and spatial planning. This link can be strengthened again in the next programming period. In addition, the EIB offers funding opportunities for scalable actions that can be supported through advisory services to ensure effective application of the territorial approach.

    - **Peer-learning.** Application of the Territorial Agenda is not just about new projects and approaches. In many cases it is also about exchanging experiences, sharing practices and peer learning. ESPON is offering knowledge transfer services (e.g. peer-learning and capacity building opportunities) that could be more broadly activated. Furthermore, other EU programmes support such efforts, and the NTCCP could establish closer links to these programmes to better understand what they offer. These include peer review and help desk

offers from the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform.[11] For urban issues, Urbact and the European Urban Initiative offer networks, expert support and capacity building activities.[12] To strengthen the territorial dimension in Cohesion Policy programmes, the REGIO Peer2Peer+, with TAIEX-REGIO Peer2Peer and REGIO Peer2Peer Communities might be of interest.[13] For the territorial dimension of larger governance arrangements and institutional reforms, the DG REFORM Technical Support Instrument (TSI) could be of interest.[14]

- **Back-office tasks.** Support for secretarial or back-office tasks will also require funding. For the Urban Agenda, this support is mainly financed via DG REGIO as urban policies fit the EU competences. The question remains open when it comes to the intergovernmental approach of the Territorial Agenda. Still a formal request to DG REGIO for funding could be considered. Alternatively, drawing on the example of governance support to macro-regional strategies provided by transnational Interreg programmes, the NTCCP could identify particular back-office support tasks and investigate funding possibilities with ESPON and other interregional programmes (notably under Interreg Europe, Urbact or Interact).

Takeaway messages

- The Territorial Agenda has substantial room for improvement of its governance structures to improve the continuity of advocating for a stronger territorial dimension of EU policies.
- Strengthening this governance may require new thinking in terms of back-office support, with links to other policies and existing funding mechanisms.
- Improved governance needs more ownership from key players with better links to ongoing EU policy agendas.

[11] See https://www.interregeurope.eu/policy-learning-platform

[12] See https://urbact.eu/what-we-offer and https://www.urban-initiative.eu/

[13] See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/how/improving-investment/regio-peer-2-peer_en

[14] See https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/technical-support-instrument/technical-support-instrument-tsi_en

2 Towards a framework for action

The Territorial Agenda is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end, a tool in the battles that need to be fought. The debate on how to develop and strengthen its application, should recall the purpose of the Territorial Agenda:

Paragraph 6 the preamble to the Territorial Agenda states that it provides an 'action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion' in Europe. The opening paragraph (43) of chapter 3 could be summarised as follows: 'Ensure a sustainable future for all places and people', by 'fostering a common understanding' that development needs and impacts of future developments differ between places, and by 'strengthening cooperation and coordination between places, levels of governments, policy sectors and societal groups' to address complex issues and utilise diverse potential.

As stated in the Territorial Agenda, the aim of territorial cohesion or a sustainable future for all places and people is too grand for an intergovernmental policy without implementation instruments to achieve this. It can merely promote this aim, along three strands:

- **Providing supporting evidence** to nourish a common understanding of the territorial diversity of developments, development needs and policy impacts;
- **Influencing other policies** to pay more attention to territorial diversity and their territorial impacts and to develop place-sensitive governance approaches; and
- **Strengthening capacity** and cooperation for territorial cohesion and territorial development players.

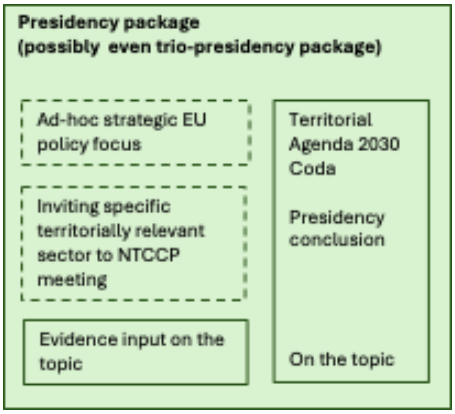
At present, these strands are advanced mainly thanks to the efforts undertaken by the rotating EU Presidencies; the pilot actions leaders and stakeholders; and ESPON. However, they continue to be advanced in an unsystematic and uncoordinated manner.

Bringing them together in an action-oriented framework to promote territorial cohesion, as it is called in the Territorial Agenda 2030, can strengthen synergies between them and step by step build blocks or inputs for the next Territorial Agenda. The next Territorial Agenda should be more than just a revised version of Territorial Agenda 2030. This requires preparatory work, which needs to start now, including the development of thematic annexes or Codas to the Territorial Agenda 2030.

Learning from, and building upon, the existing 'service package' offered by ESPON to each rotating Presidency, an enhanced roadmap or framework for action could be envisaged. This could include thematic clusters or Presidency packages bringing together new evidence, dialogue with sector policies and capacity building in the form of two kinds of pilot projects.

Each package could be taken on by an EU Presidency or shared over several Presidencies e.g. a Trio-Presidency. Each package might involve evidence input on the topic, e.g. provided by ESPON, inviting representatives of relevant other policies to the NTCCP meeting to discuss the territorial dimension of their policies, an ad-hoc NTTCP working group, where NTCCP members can exchange on a policy topic more in-depth and possibly even develop a pilot action addressing the issue.

Figure 2.1 Presidency package



The results of the activities could be synthesised in a document which would form an official annex or Coda to the Territorial Agenda 2030 and be part of the respective presidency conclusions (see Figure 2.1).

The thematic focus of the package should be linked to policy debates in the EU and prepare for defining of the next Territorial Agenda and cover:

- Place-based Cohesion Policy post 2027;
- Territorial dimension of the European semester;
- Territorial principles for Europe;
- Territorial dimension of EU enlargement;
- Importance of the territorial perspective for competitiveness;
- …

Putting this idea on a timeline and taking into account pivotal moments to influence Cohesion Policy, the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and work programmes of the next Commissions highlight a few crucial windows of opportunity (see Figure 2.2):

- 2025: Influence EU Cohesion Policy regulations 2028-2034;
- 2025: Influence overall policies, e.g. Commission working programme 2024-2028 and MFF 2028-2034;
- 2027: Influence the drafting of Cohesion Policy programmes (and possibly other EU programmes);
- 2029: Influence Commission programming programme 2029-2033
- 2030+: Influence MFF and Cohesion Policy regulations 2034+.

A number of topics could be explored and deepened to develop timely Territorial Agenda inputs to important policy debates. These could also be building blocks for the next, more ambitious Territorial Agenda, in time to influence EU policies post 2034.

The following sections present ideas for the four strands in further detail. They are a structured collection of ideas that derived from the document studies, surveys, workshops and interviews.

2.1 Supporting evidence

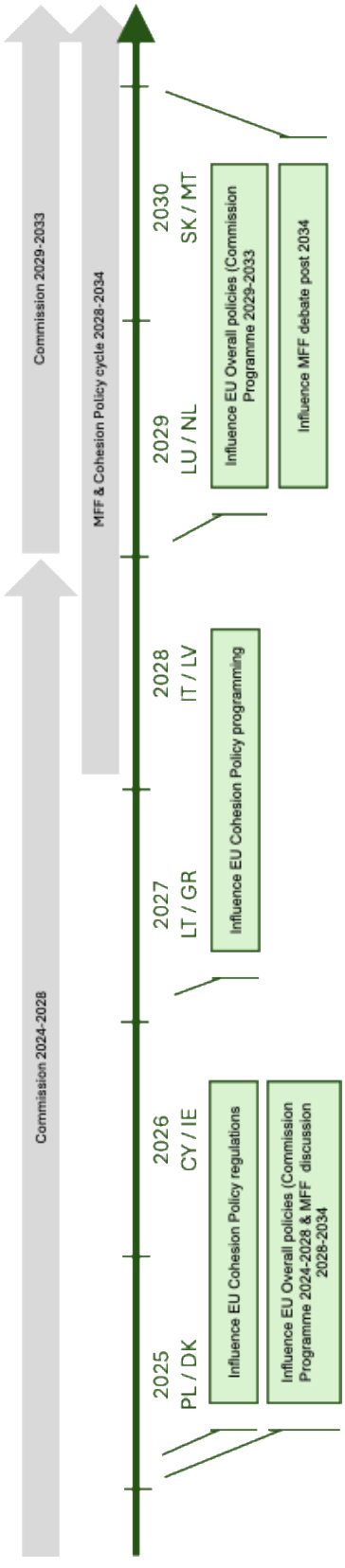
ESPON was born out of the processes leading to the ESDP and remains a key advocate of the Territorial Agenda. It provides important territorial evidence informing decision making about territorial diversity and impacts. Its work programme embeds the priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and allocates resources to support its implementation. This includes delivering territorial evidence for pilot actions; analyses and policy briefs for each EU Presidency; moderation of policy labs and peer exchanges etc.

Interviews and group discussions highlight two types of evidence support where ESPON could strengthen Territorial Agenda processes:

- **Presidency topics.** Following the idea of thematic clusters or Presidency packages, ESPON could provide territorial evidence and/or develop policy briefs for each thematic cluster. If the Presidencies align the thematic focus of their respective package and of their Presidency, this could e.g. be in form of the Presidency support already provided.

- **Larger studies supporting the application process with evidence.** A number of topics for larger studies for ESPON could help the application of the Territorial Agenda in member states and at local and regional level:

Figure 2.2 Timeline for possible action



- **Analysis of barriers to application of the principles.** Drawing on the intergovernmental multilateral cooperation om spatial planning and development in the Baltic Sea Region (VASAB) and the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (Helsinki Commission, HELCOM) experience of maritime spatial planning, a detailed analysis of individual country barriers to application of Territorial Agenda principles could be helpful. This could cluster countries with similar barriers to identify targeted solutions, including elaboration and deepening of the ESPON COMPASS[15] study on the 'Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe'.
- **Handbook on applying Territorial Agenda principles.** Putting more emphasis on the territorial principles put forward in the Territorial Agenda, a handbook on how to apply them might help their further advocation. This could be inspired by the 2013 Polish Presidency publication on a place-based territorial sensitive and integrated approach[16], the handbook on territorial cohesion[17] and the handbook on the national implementation of the territorial agenda[18], both prepared by Hungary, the INTERACT territorial package[19], as well as the ESPON guide for better territorial governance in Europe[20].

- **Larger studies supporting European policy debates with evidence.** A number of topics for larger studies could provide larger European policy debates with territorial evidence and might be of interest for ESPON:
  - **Cost-benefit analysis of place-based approaches.** A consistent argument put forward by the Territorial Agenda community is that paying more attention to the territorial dimension of policies, i.e. making better use of diverse territorial potential and/or reducing negative territorial impacts, makes policies more cost efficient and effective. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. Could ESPON provide a study of the cost-benefits of place-based approaches? This could inform a macro-economic study inspired by the one on the cost of non-coordination[21] or collect examples specifying the costs and benefits of a place-based approach.
  - **Territorial dimension for competitiveness.** Boosting competitiveness in Europe and the global competitiveness of the EU will be a key priority of the new EU Commission. This will need to utilise the potential of all places and make best use of Europe's territorial diversity. Supporting evidence on how to strengthen a place-based approach to increase competitiveness and avoid a policy focusing on increased competitiveness leading to increasing territorial inequalities might strengthen territorial awareness in key EU policies. This may also include the importance of interregional links and cooperation across territories.[22]
  - **Territorial dimension of EU enlargement.** Future EU enlargements will substantially increase EU territorial diversity. Territorial evidence might help to better understand these new diversities, how territories in the enlargement countries and in current member states that will be affected by enlargement. Such a study could further develop and deepen first assessments already carried out by other players, such as CPMR.

[15] ESPON, COMPASS - Comparative Analysis of Territorial Governance and Spatial Planning Systems in Europe - Final Report (2018).

[16] Ministry of Regional Development, Poland, Place-based territorially sensitive and integrated approach, 2013.

[17] Ministry for National Development and Economy, Republic of Hungary, Handbook on Territorial Cohesion, 2009.

[18] Ministry for National Development and Economy, Republic of Hungary, Handbook for the National Implementation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union. The Case of Hungary., 2010.

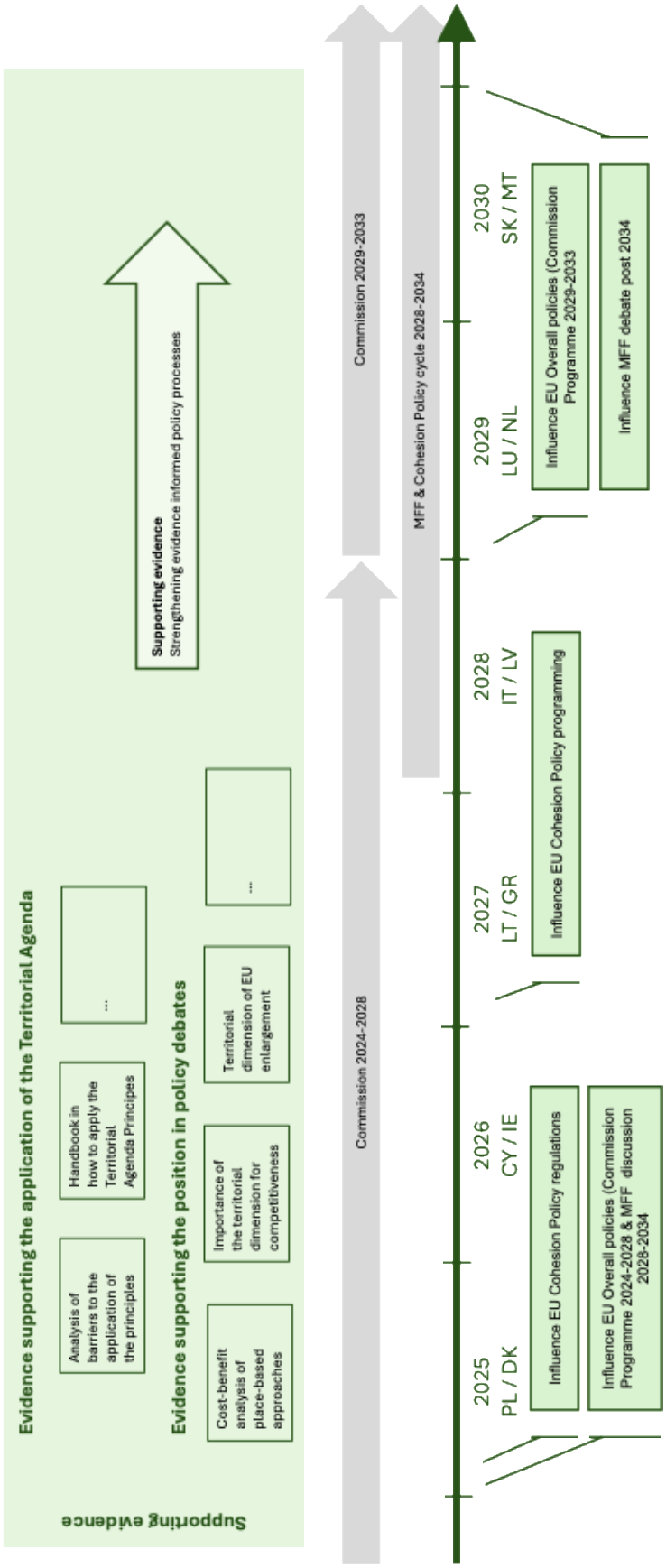
[19] See https://www.interact-eu.net/media/219/download/2022-03-11%20Territorial%20Package%20%281%29.pdf?v=1

[20] See https://archive.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/ESPON_Governance_Handbook.pdf

[21] See Jacques Robert et. Al (2001) Spatial impacts of community policies and costs of non-co-ordination

[22] Ron Boschma, 'Cohesion Policy and Its Contribution to Enhancing Regional Resilience against Emerging Challenges' (European Commission, 2023) <https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/how/future-cohesion-policy/Academic_Paper_RonBoschma.pdf>.

Figure 2.3 Timelines – supporting evidence



2.2 Strengthen your own application

Tailored territorial evidence can also inform capacity building and cooperation for territorial cohesion and development.

Based on interviews and group discussions, three types of activities to strengthen the application of the Territorial Agenda have been identified:

- **Pilot actions.** The continuation and further development of the current flexible and easy to engage approach allows local and regional representatives to come together exchange and learn from each other. This could be improved with:
  - Further publicising on how to apply for pilot actions, even for non-NTCCP members;
  - More information on existing funding opportunities for pilot actions, notably the current support by the ESPON Programme, or for any follow up support through Interreg, or the EIB for scalable actions that can be financed and supported through advisory services;
  - Synthesis of transferable lessons on application of the Territorial Agenda from all pilot actions;
  - Labelling of pilot actions as 'Territorial Agenda Pilot Actions' strengthening the link to the Territorial Agenda and enhancing the acknowledgement and added value of the Territorial Agenda and its principles.
  - Improved dissemination of pilot action experience and results, beyond existing individual pilot actions and enabling mutual exchange sand learning between pilot actions.

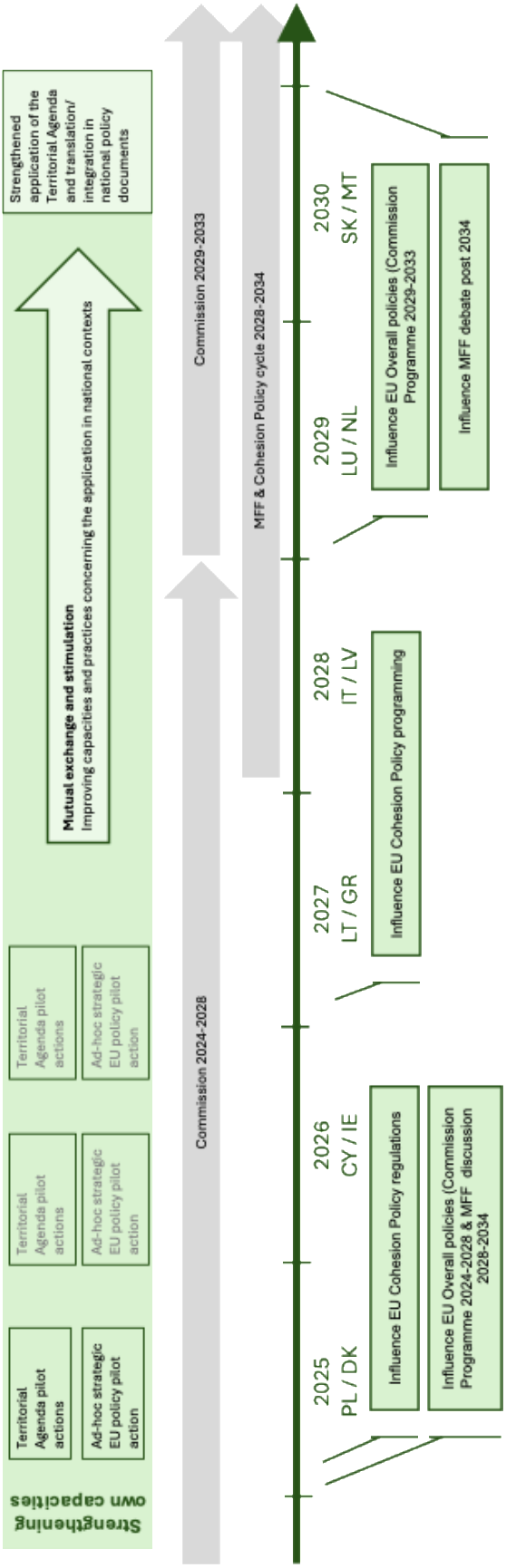
- **Peer learning.** Further publicise and strengthen opportunities offered by ESPON and consider additional capacity building or peer-learning opportunities for local and regional authorities. Strengthening capacity to apply the place-based approach advocated in the Territorial Agenda is often about exchanging experience, sharing practices and peer learning. Beyond ESPON, various EU programmes also support such efforts (e.g. the Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform). This could be communicated more clearly and the NTCCP could establish closer links to these other programmes to better understand what they offer (see also section 1.4). In a longer term, a one-stop-shop for capacity building for all territorial actors could be considered by the interregional Interreg programmes.

- **Ad-hoc NTTCP policy working groups.** Learning and exchange is not only helpful for local and regional stakeholders. NTCCP members are often confronted with policy issues – e.g. related to the application of new EU directives, regulations and initiatives with a territorial dimension. For some of these, exchanges among colleagues from different countries might be helpful. A possible format could be ad-hoc NTTCP policy working groups where interested NTCCP members to exchange on a topic more in-depth. Interested countries may discuss how they address the link between territorial and sector policies in their countries, exchange experience and report back to the NTCCP.

Another proposal for strengthening the engagement of local and regional players and tighten the link with Cohesion Policy is a Territorial Agenda strand in REGIO Awards.[23]

[23] See https://regiostarsawards.eu/

Figure 2.4 Timelines – strengthening capacity



2.3 Influencing other policies

Territorial cohesion and a desirable future for all places and people requires a wide range of policies to buy in. This goes beyond 'no harm to cohesion' as formulated in the 9th Cohesion Report. It requires a wide range of EU and national policies to increase their spatial awareness. This regards the benefits a more place-based approach may offer to achieving policy objectives and the impacts policies have on territorial development and disparities.

Interviews and group discussions highlighted several ideas for strengthening the dialogue with other policies, among which:

- **Invite to each NTCCP meeting representatives from a sector** with spatial implications to present their policy and open a discussion to better understand the spatial implications and how they differ between countries. This could be linked to a policy focus of the Presidency. Preferably, invitees would include at least one EU, e.g. a representative of the relevant European Commission's Directorates General, and one national or regional level representative for the policy. The outcomes of the discussion should serve on the one hand, to better integrate the territorial principles into sectoral policies and on the other, to ensure that the territorial principles are relevant for different policy sectors.

- **Sector-specific short explainers on Territorial Agenda principles**, outlining the territorial diversities for a sector, possible gains from utilising it and the territorial impacts of the policy. These could be short papers or even short videos that function as eye openers. This would allow to explain the objective of the Territorial Agenda and the territorial principles – and why they are relevant – to specific target groups, like European Commission's Directorates General or umbrella interest organisations.

- **Strengthen application of TIAs for new EU directives and regulations**. This could involve a stronger territorial dimension in the general EU impact assessment. It could also mean stronger participatory TIAs carried out by the Committee of the Regions (CoR) primarily with ESPON. Ideally, invitations to these sessions could go beyond CoR members to include other national and regional representatives.

- **An EU White Paper on Territorial Cohesion.** In 2008, the European Commission published a Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion[24], with expectations this might be followed by a White Paper. However, this never happened. A White Paper on Territorial Cohesion could underline the importance of the territorial dimension to increasing competitiveness and supporting the green, digital and demographic transitions in the EU, but also of cohesion, highlighting that the lack of cohesion may negatively affect functioning of the EU Single Market and competitiveness itself. Being a Commission initiative, an EU White Paper would complement the intergovernmental Territorial Agenda process.

- **A single policy document to provides a reference framework for territorial policy issues?** The EU seems to experience a proliferation of policy objectives, agendas and strategies. All require attention from increasingly overburdened policy makers, as well as administration and funding resources in an environment of increasingly sparse public finances. Most of these policies highlight the importance of better policy integration and coordination. For territorial cohesion and development there are at least three European policy documents, each targeting a particular

[24] See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2008/green-paper-on-territorial-cohesion-turning-territorial-diversity-into-strength

segment and audience: Territorial Agenda[25], Urban Agenda / Leipzig Charter[26] and Rural Vision[27] All three advocate better integrated territorial, urban and rural development and might benefit from a more coordinated approach to policy development and implementation through more consolidated efforts. In this case, the Territorial Agenda, as the geographically broadest document, could take the lead and establish a dialogue on how to join forces.

Influencing other EU and national policies and possibly even EU policy debates, requires time and effort. Therefore, it might be necessary to pick the battles in which to engage. Policy arenas/discussions to be targeted include:

- **EU Strategy,** focusing on the big lines of EU policies and budget negotiations which could include stressing the relevance of a territorial dimension or place-based approach to EU policies. Territorial cohesion and the territorial approach should be elevated to the same priority level as other EU goals not at least in the context of the European semester. This includes ongoing debates about the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the Commission Work Programme 2023-2029 or the MFF 2028-2034. This is even more relevant in light of discussions on a drastic simplification and shift to a performance-based architecture for EU funding mechanisms. Instead of detailed suggestions for regulations or guidelines, here a clear and positive message about the added value of the main principles of the territorial approach should be the focus (see also textbox on establishing cohesion as a value in EU and national policy processes).

- **EU Cohesion Policy design**, focussing on the orientation of Cohesion Policy and the formulation of regulations, provisions and guidelines. Some ideas for points to be stressed at this level are included in the textbox on strengthening the territorial dimension of Cohesion Policy. The focus would mainly be on Cohesion Policy 2028-2034 regulations and guidelines. Similar approaches could also be envisaged for other EU Policies.

- **Cohesion Policy implementation,** focussing the delivery of Cohesion Policy through the formulation and implementation of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes 2028-2034. In the past, NTCCP colleagues at DG REGIO and in member states used their windows of opportunity to stress the need to strengthen the territorial dimension, place-based approach or references to the Territorial Agenda. When the Territorial Agenda 2030 was finalised most programme documents were already being elaborated which made it difficult to feed it explicitly into the programme documents. As the Territorial Agenda is available now, it could be used more strongly in dialogues on future programmes. Beyond the debate about national and regional programmes, there is the special case of transnational Interreg programmes. Some proposals included making them more attuned to transnational spatial development issues and the Territorial Agenda (see earlier textbox on the origin of the transnational Interreg strand).

[25] See https://territorialagenda.eu/

[26] See https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/

[27] See https://rural-vision.europa.eu/

Establishing cohesion as a value in EU and national policy processes
A catalogue of territorial principle for the EU overall policies and MFF discussion 2028-2034

Cohesion and the territorial approach should be elevated to the same priority level as other EU goals, with explicit recognition that achieving cohesion objectives demands a unified and coordinated effort, integrating all EU policies and the actions of national and sub-national authorities. In order to strengthen territorial cohesion and the policy objective of thriving towards a desirable future for all places and people, the territorial dimension and principles need to be embedded in all EU policies or programmes that envisage national envelopes as well as in national policies. This could build on the idea of cohesion defined in the article 174 of the EU Treaty (on the Functioning of the European Union), and emphasise the importance of economic, social, and territorial cohesion, highlighting the need to address disparities between different regions and the challenges posed by less-favoured areas. It could also advocate cohesion as a value in policy making, as proposed by the European Committee of the Regions.[28] Ideally, the territorial dimension and principles would be integrated into an overall strategic framework, the European semester and country-specific recommendations:

- **Strategic territorial reference framework.** It would establish a vision and core objectives that prioritize territorial cohesion, shaping decisions related to the European Semester, country-specific recommendations, and the formulation of detailed policy and funding priorities. This strategic framework would ensure coherence across various EU policies. To effectively enhance the territorial dimension and uphold its principles, it is essential to establish clear priorities and a shared sense of direction. A common territorial vision for Europe could serve this purpose, providing a forward-looking perspective on the future of the European territory, informed by territorial analysis from Cohesion Reports, the JRC, and ESPON**.** The Territorial Agenda 2030 can inspire this territorial vision.
- **The European Semester.** As a central policy coordination mechanism between the EU and Member States policies, it should have the ambition to include cohesion as a value in all policies and put particular emphasis on the long-term, coherent development and acknowledging the synergies between EU, national, and subnational policies, along with their territorial impacts and implications.
- **Territorial principles in future 'national cohesion plans'.** Following von der Leyen's call for simplification, there will probably be a plan for each country, linking EU investment with reforms and national and private funding.[29] To ensure a future for all places and the value of cohesion, these national plans should explicitly address the territorial dimension of the planned investments and reforms, how they will help to better exploit the country's diverse territorial potential and reduce territorial imbalances and development traps.
- **Territorial disparities.** A common territorial reference framework must provide the basis for setting territorial targets that can be used for performance-based policies and funding agreements. Such targets can address, for example, the reduction of disparities at different geographical levels - from intra-regional to national and European. They can also address a wide range of thematic objectives, such as reducing development traps, moving towards a circular economy, increasing the share of sustainable mobility, strengthening cross-border value chains.
- **Territorial Principles**. All the above should take place in respect and following the Territorial Principles of the place-based approaches and the stakeholder involvement, as outlined in the textbox 'Territorial Principles explained'.

[28] CoR, *Cohesion as an Overall Value of the European Union* (Publications Office, 2021) <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2863/9390> [accessed 2 June 2022].

[29] Ursula von der Leyen, 'Europe's Choice. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029', 2024 <https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf>.

Strengthening the Territorial Dimension in Cohesion Policy

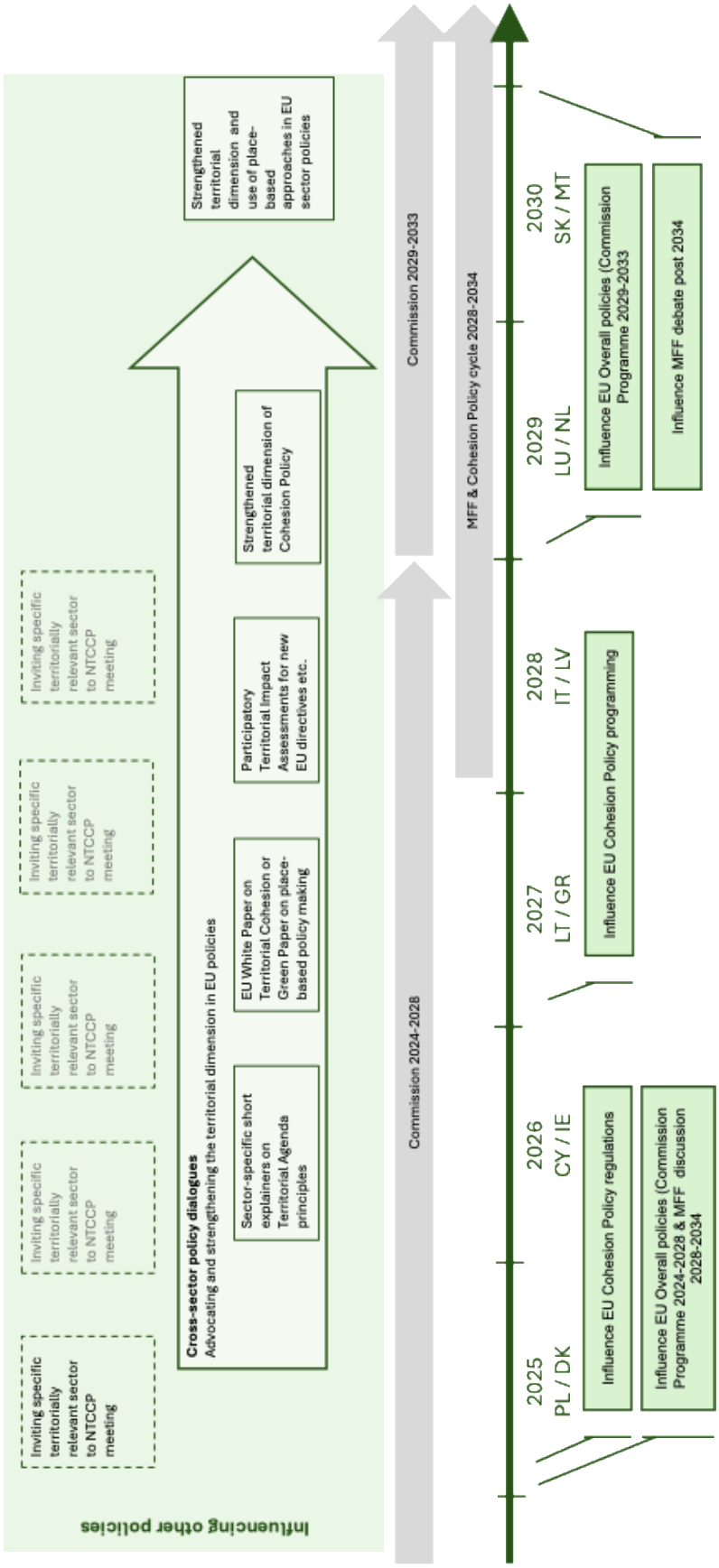
The NTCCP may ask the Polish EU Presidency to debate the Territorial Agenda and its link to Cohesion Policy at the envisaged ministerial meeting. The interviews and discussions provided concrete suggestions to strengthen the territorial dimension and place-based approach in future Cohesion Policy (based on an assumed continuation of the current format of Cohesion Policy):

- **The future common provisions** could refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030 and explicitly integrate territorial principles. This could be done in the articles concerning policy objectives (currently Article 5) and horizontal principles (Article 9). It could also be done in articles on the content of Partnership Agreements (Article 11) or Programmes (Article 22) requesting these documents specify their contribution to territorial cohesion and their application of place-based approaches. It could also be done through direct reference to the Territorial Agenda 2030 in a future chapter on territorial development (currently Chapter III), and articles on integrated territorial development (Article 28), territorial strategies (Article 29), ITI (Article 30), CLLD (Article 31), and CLLD strategies (Article 32), etc.
- **An annex to future common provisions** could detail the territorial principles and the territorial approach, in line with the Territorial Agenda, underpinning Cohesion Policy. It could help to guide programmes on how to deal with the requirements in the Common Provisions. This could be inspired by Annex I on the Common Strategic Framework in the CPR for 2014-2020.
- **Territorial Impact Assessments (TIA)** of national, sector and possibly even regional and Interreg programmes could be requested as part of programme development. TIAs could also be requested for Partnership Agreement (or the national plans proposed by Ursula von der Leyen[30]) to define the territorial impact of the planned interventions at an early stage. Requesting a TIA as part of the SWOT analysis of the programme area, would help programmes to strengthen their place-based approaches and better link sector policies with regional development objectives.
- **Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)** and other territorial tools such as CLLD or equivalent strategic national tools that follow and respect specific territorial needs, based on the principles of the Territorial Agenda, could be more widely used and strengthened in Cohesion Policy. Member states and programmes could be incentivised to make more use of these territorial tools. Parts of the budget could be earmarked for the use of territorial tools such as ITIs and CLLDs, similar to existing urban earmarking.
- **European Territorial Cooperation (Interreg)** is essential for EU integration and balanced territorial development. Interreg is a distinctive element of Cohesion Policy, not only for building social and economic relations within the EU but also for fostering good relations with non-EU neighbouring countries. The future of Interreg strands and programmes has to be ensured. As highlighted by the high-level group on the future of Cohesion Policy[31], interregional cooperation in particular deserves more attention, enabling local and regional players to collaborate with peers across the EU and beyond. ESPON should be activated to support further Territorial Agenda pilot actions, capacity building and peer-learning for local and regional development issues and place-based approaches. Other programmes (e.g. Interreg Europe or Urbact) could also contribute to capacity building and peer exchanges. In general, the thematic orientation of Interreg programmes should pay more attention to spatial development, place-based approaches and Territorial Agenda 2030 principles; the original reason to establish Interreg. Furthermore, the need for an effective support to rotating Presidencies and Territorial Agenda back-office tasks should be reconsidered.
- **Instruments for Pre-accession (IPA)** are vital to integrating future EU member states. The envisaged enlargements will substantially increase territorial diversity across the EU. To address this and ensure IPA programmes help prepare for accession, they could be asked to explicitly address the territorial dimension of enlargement, as well as strengthen place-based approaches and partnership principles in the design and implementation of IPA programmes.

[30] Ursula von der Leyen, 'Europe's Choice. Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029', 2024.

[31] European Commission.

Figure 2.5 Timelines – influencing other policies



2.4 Preparing for the next Territorial Agenda

The Territorial Agenda is a reference document for increasing territorial cohesion, place-based approaches and the territorial sensitivity of policies. For this the next Territorial Agenda should consider:

- **Being more outspoken.** It is challenging for diverse players coming together in the DGTC to be outspoken as all representatives need to carefully balance positions on territorial matters and national or institutional positions. Yet, for the next Territorial Agenda to have more vigour common lines which are more provocative (e.g. in terms of new thinking) and go beyond widely accepted common-sense statements needed to be identified. This takes time.

- **Strengthening the focus.** The Territorial Agenda is a means to an end. Even if that end is as broad as territorial cohesion and a desirable future for all places and people and although its principles shall remain wide and universal, it is necessary to identify a focus. Trying to achieve everything is overambitious for a document such as the Territorial Agenda. Considering the efforts to advocate and apply it, what targeted focus is achievable? Identifying clear priorities requires exploring different focus areas. This could be through a series of discussion papers.

- **Shared sense of direction.** To identify clear priorities, a common sense of direction is needed to extract more detailed objectives. This could be a shared territorial vision for Europe outlining ideas about the future of the European territory, respecting the territorial diversities and aiming at resilient, thriving and inclusive places and citizens. In the absence of an overarching EU policies offering a shared vision for the EU and neighbouring countries, the next Territorial Agenda might aim at providing a territorial stepping stone for broader debate on a shared vision for Europe and a reference point for proposed EU actions.

- **Increased ownership.** In many regards the Territorial Agenda 2030 is merely a piece of paper. For the next Territorial Agenda to better unfold its transformative potential, it requires more engagement of the Territorial Agenda community and a stronger sense of ownership among its stakeholders (namely the DGTC and NTCCP). This will also require processes for participants to more actively engage with the elaboration and drafting of the document.

Achieving these improvements requires more than a revision of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and adaptation to new developments and changing policy priorities. Indeed, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is already the revised version of the Territorial Agenda 2020 which was a revised version of the Territorial Agenda for the EU. To increase the vigour, the next Territorial Agenda should be elaborated, building on existing experience and material prepared until then (see earlier sections), but based on up-to-date topics and thorough discussions about its aims and ambitions.

To stimulate such discussions and help the preparation of the next Territorial Agenda, we suggest a series of position papers as annexes or Codas to the Territorial Agenda 2030. These should be official, presented as policy statements of the Territorial Agenda community – approved by the DGTC – and be published coherently on the Territorial Agenda website. Preferably there could be one position paper per year or EU Presidency. This would ensure the Territorial Agenda stays in the debate, with inputs to policy debates at short notice, and help elaboration of the next Territorial Agenda.

These position papers or Codas to the Territorial Agenda 2030 should be informative, to-the-point, short and concise and each of them should address a specific topic. Possible themes might be:

- 2025 Strengthen the territorial dimension of future Cohesion Policy (see e.g. textbox in section 2.3)
- 2025 Putting territorial principles into practice (see textbox below)
- 2026 Importance of the territorial dimension to boosting competitiveness in Europe
- 2026 Territorial dimension of enlargement
- ....

Territorial Principles explained

The NTCCP may consider further dwelling on the principles underpinning the Territorial Agenda 2030, why these are important for policy making at all governance levels and in different sectors, and how they can be better promoted to a larger audience.

Place-based approaches are essential to better reflect and use territorial diversity in policy making, increasing policy efficiency and effectiveness and contributing to territorial cohesion. Important tools to strengthen place-based approaches include:

- **Territorial Impact Assessments (TIA).** Assessing the potential impacts of policies on different regions ensures that decisions are made with a clear understanding of how they will affect various territories. At the same time, taking account of the territorial needs, will increase the effectiveness of EU sectoral policies, too. TIAs shall also include assessing the impacts on different types of territories, such as rural areas (rural proofing) and areas vulnerable to climate change (climate proofing). Furthermore, including further available statistics at LAU1 and LAU2 levels and functional areas would further increase the territorial dimension. This helps to avoid unintended negative consequences and promotes balanced development across regions and policies.
- **Integrated Territorial tools.** Coordinating investments across local and regional administrative boundaries and across sectors maximises their impact and ensures resources are used efficiently to address the specific needs and opportunities of each territory.
- **Europe Closer to Citizens (PO5).** By considering local and regional contexts in policy making and especially EU Cohesion Policy programmes and operations, investments can better meet the expectations and needs of citizens, fostering a stronger connection between people and European institutions.
- **Regional and Local Specificities.** Recognising and leveraging the unique characteristics of different regions encourages innovative and context-sensitive solutions, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Stakeholder involvement is essential for territorial cohesion and working towards a future for all places, because it ensures the voices and perspectives of those directly affected by policies are considered in the decision-making process. By engaging stakeholders, policies can be tailored to address the unique needs and challenges of different places. Important dimensions of stakeholder involvement include:

- **Cross-sector cooperation (horizontal policy cooperation).** Involving various sectors in decision making processes allows for more comprehensive and coherent policies that address multiple dimensions of territorial development.
- **Cross-administrative level cooperation (vertical policy cooperation).** Collaboration between different levels of government ensures that policies are well-coordinated and that local, regional and national priorities are aligned, leading to more effective governance.
- **Cross-border cooperation.** Promoting cooperation across administrative borders is essential for a functional area perspective and helps address challenges and opportunities, fostering integration and cohesion across Europe.
- **Strengthening stakeholder capacity.** Empowering stakeholders with skills and resources enhances their ability to contribute to the development process, leading to more inclusive and participatory governance.

By integrating these principles, policy makers can ensure that policies are better tailored to the specific potential and needs of Europe's diverse places, ultimately contributing to more cohesive and resilient territorial development in Europe.

Content-wise, these position papers or Codas could be informed by evidence from ESPON (see section 2.1), pilot actions and ad-hoc NTTCP policy working groups (see section 2.2), as well as discussions with representatives of relevant EU policies at NTCCP meetings (see 2.3). It might also involve discussions about an improved coordination of policy processes and implementation efforts of the Territorial Agenda, Urban Agenda / Leipzig Charter and Rural Vision.

Step by step, these position papers or Codas could thus build up inputs shaping the next Territorial Agenda. Furthermore, they could serve as inputs to informal ministerial meetings to ensure the Territorial Agenda stays on the agenda (see Figure 2.6).

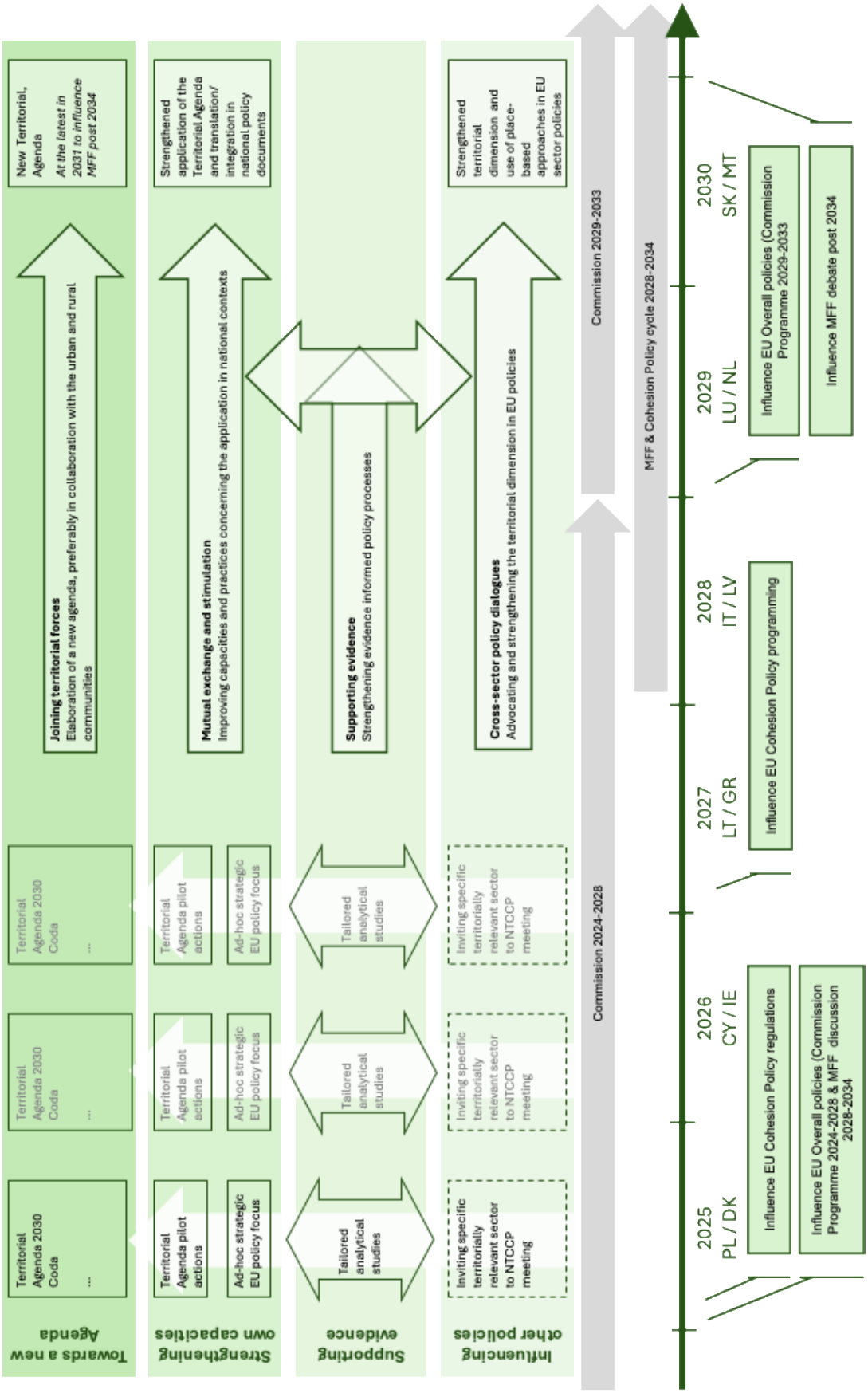
Bringing all the aspects together in a framework for action to strengthen application of the Territorial Agenda 2030 and prepare the next Territorial Agenda shows how supporting evidence, strengthened capacity and dialogue with other policies work together in preparing the next Territorial Agenda. Integrating the different ideas in a possible roadmap or set of milestones, it could look as in Table 2.1. The table is based on the topics, policies and ideas for supporting evidence mentioned in the above chapters. In addition to the topics and policies addressed in the table, there are certainly a wide range of other national and EU policies which can be of relevance, e.g. transport, housing, climate change. digitalisation.

The possible roadmap or milestones are just a suggestion for further discussion by the forthcoming EU Presidencies and Presidency Trios, also taking into account the resources and time they are able to invest in furthering the Territorial Agenda and a future for all places and people.

Table 2.1 Possible roadmap & milestones towards the next Territorial Agenda

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Topics (also for possible pilot projects)</th><th>Policies to be addressed</th><th>Evidence</th><th>Outcomes</th></tr>
<tr><td>2025 PL</td><td rowspan="2">Territorial dimension of future Cohesion Policy and European Semester</td><td rowspan="2">Cohesion Policy regulations;
European Semester</td><td rowspan="2">Handbook on applying Territorial principes</td><td rowspan="2">Coda: EU policies & Cohesion Policy</td></tr>
<tr><td>2025 DK</td></tr>
<tr><td>2026 CY</td><td rowspan="2">Competitiveness</td><td>Competition Policy</td><td>Cost-benefit analysis of place-based approaches</td><td rowspan="2">Coda: Territorial principles</td></tr>
<tr><td>2026 IE</td><td>Industrial Policy</td><td>Territorial dimension of competitiveness</td></tr>
<tr><td>2027 LT</td><td>20 years Territorial Agenda (event)</td><td rowspan="2">Cohesion Policy programmes;
Accession Policy</td><td>Territorial principles for Cohesion Policy programmes</td><td rowspan="2">Coda: Territorial dimension of competitiveness</td></tr>
<tr><td>2027 GR</td><td>EU enlargement</td><td>Territorial dimension of enlargement</td></tr>
<tr><td>2028 IT</td><td rowspan="2">Increasing cooperation with urban and rural policies</td><td rowspan="2">Urban Policy;
Rural Policy</td><td rowspan="2">Integrated rural, urban, territorial approaches</td><td rowspan="2">Coda: Territorial dimension of EU enlargement</td></tr>
<tr><td>2028 LV</td></tr>
<tr><td>2029 LU</td><td rowspan="2">30 years ESDP (event)
Preparation of next Territorial Agenda</td><td rowspan="2">EU Commission programme 2029-2033</td><td rowspan="2">Analysis of barriers to the application of territorial principles</td><td rowspan="2">Coda: Territorial, urban, rural policy collaboration</td></tr>
<tr><td>2029 NL</td><td rowspan="3">Next Territorial Agenda</td></tr>
<tr><td>2030 SK</td><td rowspan="2">Preparation and adoption of next Territorial Agenda</td><td rowspan="2">MFF & EU policies post 2034</td><td rowspan="2">tbc.</td></tr>
<tr><td>2030 MT</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 2.6 Framework for action – preparation of the next Territorial Agenda



3 Annex

3.1 Review of academic literature

The review of academic literature on the Territorial Agenda 2030 (EUTA 2030) analyses scientific research contributions to the design, preparation and deployment of the EU Territorial Agenda 2030. The focus was on scientific articles and books published between 2020 and 2023, coinciding with the preparation and deployment of the EU Territorial Agenda 2030. The Google Scholar database was the primary source for this review, accommodating the inclusion of 'grey' scientific literature and articles addressing the EU Territorial Agenda from various scientific perspectives, even if not indexed in Web of Science or Scopus.

To start with, a general search used the search string 'Territorial Agenda 2030*,' yielding 340 hits, including duplicates. Subsequently, only English papers and books were considered. Examining their abstracts and a few additional sources resulted in 37 publications with clear references to the EU Territorial Agenda 2030. These were reviewed in a structured manner to gain information on:

- How the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities have been assessed, considering strengths and weaknesses/barriers (Assessment of policy relevance).
- Innovations proposed to enhance implementation of the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 (Improved implementation).
- How the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 has been deconstructed into concrete actions (Description of concrete actions/examples).

The reviewed literature offers interesting insights into the discourse surrounding the Territorial Agenda 2030, highlighting its multifaceted nature and varied scholarly interpretations. While the Agenda is positively received overall, critiques and suggestions for improvement underscore the ongoing dialogue on enhancing its efficacy and impact. Moving forward, continued scholarly engagement and empirical research will be essential to refining implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030.

Most of the publications adopted a positive stance towards the Territorial Agenda 2030, perceiving it as a pivotal document supporting policy considerations and societal goals. However, several publications offered nuanced critiques, particularly regarding conceptual clarity, policy coherence and specific policy options within the Agenda. Notable authors highlighted both strengths and weaknesses in the Agenda's formulation and implementation.

Suggestions for improving implementation were varied and encompassed governance mechanisms, policy directives and stakeholder engagement. Recommendations included enhancing conceptual clarity, strengthening cohesion policy, promoting place-based approaches and fostering greater alignment between EU-level and national policy frameworks and funding mechanisms. Several authors emphasised the importance of fostering grassroots initiatives and enhancing policy learning mechanisms.

The analysis of concrete actions and examples under the Territorial Agenda 2030 revealed a nuanced landscape of ongoing initiatives and pilot projects across various thematic priorities. While evaluations of these initiatives were limited due to their recent inception, noteworthy examples of Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation were identified as well as initiatives beyond pilot actions.

About the publications

Of the 37 screened publications, four are chapters in monographs, one is a full-fledged monograph (with five chapters related to the Territorial Agenda 2030), two are conference speeches, and the rest (thirty) are articles published in various journals. The most targeted journals (four publications in each) are European Planning Studies (published by Taylor and Francis), Land (published by MDPI), and EUROPE XXI (published by the Polish Academy of Science.) These three journals hosted 40% of the

papers. The other journals vary by nature and excellence, but include renowned ones such as Regional Studies and Land Use Policy.

Research on the Territorial Agenda 2030 has been conducted mainly by scholars from Portugal, Germany, and Poland based on the number of publications with participation of scholars from these countries and the number of authors affiliated with a country. However, this second indicator should be interpreted with caution, since it combines the popularity of the topic among national scholars with the intensity of their publication effort. If the same authors participated in preparing more than one publication, the number of scholars is lower. An example is the very intense publication effort of Eduardo Medeiros from Portugal, who edited one monograph and is the first author of two papers.

Among the authors are scholars from non-EU countries such as the UK and Switzerland as well as Namibia, Albania, Argentina, China, and Serbia. Usually (with the exception of the UK and Switzerland), they publish in tandem with EU scholars. Two authors affiliated themselves with the EU instead of a concrete country. There is a lack of French authors researching Territorial Agenda 2030.

3.1.1 Territorial Agenda 2030 as a reference document

The 37 publications predominantly use the Territorial Agenda 2030 as a reference document, and only nine focus on it. This focus has been identified either through the keywords associated with a publication or, in the absence of these, through inspection of the title.

Key observation: Territorial Agenda 2030 has not been a popular research topic. Few papers provide a critical analysis, either as a comprehensive policy approach or its contribution to major EU goals (e.g. a Just Europe) or policy ambitions.

Territorial cohesion and/or EU Cohesion Policy are the prevailing conceptual frameworks under which the Territorial Agenda 2030 is cited (9 publications). Additionally, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is mentioned in various other contexts, including rural development and/or local development (4 publications), territorial governance (3), urban development (2), border regions (2) and energy transition (2). It is also mentioned once each under the territorial dimension in EU Policies, tourism, Service of General Interest, landscape-based spatial planning, climate resilience, migration of people, brownfield regeneration, territorial justice and equivalent living conditions, coast adaptation, regions with geographical specificities, and finally, nature conservation. Many of these themes are foundational pillars of spatial development or territorial dimensions of socio-economic development, and/or exhibit explicit connections with the Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities such as border regions, territorial governance, a healthy environment and energy transformation.

In addition, certain unexpected themes also emerge. For instance, Sayers et al.[32] conducted an analysis of coastal adaptation in the North Sea, addressing challenges related to flooding and sea-level rise. Within this context, they cite the Territorial Agenda 2030 as advocating a place-based approach and providing policy guidance on spatial development objectives. Similarly, in another study, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is a foundational reference to justify population forecasts tailored to specific locales, requiring a more detailed spatial resolution.[33] The diverse array of topics, concerns and contexts under which the Territorial Agenda 2030 is cited underscores its comprehensive nature, which is both a strength and a weakness (i.e. its capacity to cater to diverse interests).

[32] 'A Framework for Cloud to Coast Adaptation: Maturity and Experiences from across the North Sea', *Land*, 11.6 (2022), p. 950, doi:10.3390/land11060950.

[33] Aleksejs Homutiņins, Viktorija Šipilova, and Ludmila Aleksejeva, 'Population Forecast with Focus on Emigration: Scenarios for the Case of Peripheral Region', *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 10.3 (2021), p. 139, doi:10.14207/ejsd.2021.v10n3p139.

Key observation: The Territorial Agenda 2030 is firmly entrenched in the spatial domain. Nevertheless, indications suggest its potential influence on policymaking or, at least, research beyond its primary sphere of influence.

3.1.2 Policy relevance of the Territorial Agenda 20230 in academic literature

Among the three primary analytical strands provided by the reading grid, the most prevalent was the general assessment of the Territorial Agenda 2030's relevance. Most publications underscored the Territorial Agenda 2030 as a document supporting significant policy considerations, overarching societal goals, or ambitions concerning territorial or spatial reforms. Consequently, presentation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 tended to be neutral or positive, with a few exceptions voicing reservations. For instance, Greiving & Fleischhauer[34] criticised vague connections to environmental justice in the document while praising the Agenda for its concrete pilot actions related to climate change adaptation in the Alpine region. Similarly, Jakubowski & Miszczuk[35] faulted the Territorial Agenda 2030 for not advocating a departure from GDP as a key indicator of spatial diversification of well-being. Lastly, Neto et al. [36] were highly critical of the Territorial Agenda 2030's content inconsistencies, deeming its conceptual framework insufficiently clear to orient action in the European territory effectively. They also faulted the Territorial Agenda 2030 for employing broadly defined terms referencing multidimensional topics and lacking specific policy options to clarify how this conceptual framework could serve the European community. Some of these papers proposed concrete actions to overcome these shortcomings, which will be further examined in the section devoted to proposed improvements.

For policy relevance, the most common application of the Territorial Agenda 2030 was its citation as a framework document, usually to emphasise the importance of topics presented in a publication. For instance, Koutra et al.[37], discussing brownfield regeneration, stated that 'Territorial Agenda 2030 recognised brownfields as areas in economic and industrial transition with various potentials and challenges and pursued a place-based development in EU territories.' Such an attitude was evident in 27 papers, with three of them[38] exclusively referencing the Territorial Agenda 2030 in this manner. Typically, these references provided an overview of Territorial Agenda 2030, its ambitions, and priorities. An example is the formulation by Chigbu at al.[39], who described it (using a direct quotation from Territorial Agenda 2030) as 'a strategic framework document that seeks to promote an inclusive and sustainable future for all places and help achieve Sustainable Development Goals in Europe'. However, some references went into greater depth. The most insightful was offered by Böhme & Redlich[40], who asserted that the Territorial Agenda 2030 has contributed to a renewed understanding of cohesion by addressing 'mutual interdependencies between places, societal groups, and economies' within the EU and beyond. They argued 'Territorial Agenda 2030 extends cohesion ideas beyond

[34] 'Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice: State of Research and Implementation in Planning Practice in Germany and Beyond', *Town Planning Review*, 93.2 (2022), pp. 111–37, doi:10.3828/tpr.2021.26.

[35] 'New Approach towards Border Regions in the Territorial Agenda 2030', *Europa XXI*, 40 (2021), doi:10.7163/Eu21.2021.40.1.

[36] 'The Territorial Agenda 2030: Towards a Common Language? A Review of a Conceptual Framework', *Europa XXI*, 38 (2020), pp. 157–74, doi:10.7163/Eu21.2020.38.8.

[37] 'From "Brown" to "Bright": Key Issues and Challenges in Former Industrialized Areas', *Land Use Policy*, 129 (2023), p. 106672, doi:10.1016/j.landusepol.2023.106672.

[38] Koutra and others; Sayers and others; Lefteris Topaloglou and others, 'Polarization, Centralization, and Place-Based Policies in Greece', in *Spatial Justice and Cohesion*, by Matti Fritsch and others, 1st edn (Routledge, 2023), pp. 207–28, doi:10.4324/9781003229681-16.

[39] Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, Michael Klaus, and Holger Magel, 'New Hope and Future for Rural Areas under COVID-19 Circumstances? Rural Development, Pandemic Liveability and Reverse Migration.', in *Land Governance and Gender: The Tenure-Gender Nexus in Land Management and Land Policy*, ed. by Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, 1st edn (CABI, 2021), pp. 207–21, doi:10.1079/9781789247664.0017.

[40] 'The Territorial Agenda 2030 for Places and a More Cohesive European Territory?', *Planning Practice & Research*, 38.5 (2023), pp. 729–47, doi:10.1080/02697459.2023.2258029.

territorial cohesion. It puts a clear focus on citizens and people. Indeed, the territorial or place dimension is merely a vehicle to understand and improve people's livelihoods wherever they may live'.

Continuing the analysis of the relevance strand, two observations emerge:

- In addition to referencing the Territorial Agenda as a framework document, the second most popular topic related to its governance (22 publications).
- Regarding Territorial Agenda 2030 objectives, the first (Just Europe) appeared to be more popular than the second (Green Europe) – 14/21 and 7/12 publications accordingly.

It is surprising that governance issues were mentioned in so many publications, although typically in a general format with only a few references (5 publications) to pilot projects. A way of highlighting Territorial Agenda 2030 governance ambitions can be illustrated by a quotation from Bachtrögler-Unger et al.[41] They stated that 'the recently agreed Territorial Agenda 2030 provides the framework for action to promote territorial cohesion in Europe. It is based on the shared recognition that development needs and opportunities vary across territories, while at the same time, it requires cooperation and coordination between different places, as well as between different levels of government and societal groups, to address complex issues and boost potential.' This sentiment was echoed by other authors emphasising the role of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in supporting the place-based approach including [42]. Similar formulations can be found in the paper by Jakubowski & Miszczuk: Territorial Agenda 2030 'includes recommendations for more effective implementation of EU policies, paying attention to the spatial impacts of these policies and their effects on the lives of EU citizens. It also indicates actions necessary to strengthen territorial cohesion, i.e., to ensure good living conditions for all inhabitants of Europe, regardless of where they live and work.' Other authors noted: 'the Territorial Agenda 2030, which, once more into the breach, is the latest call for a renewed policy emphasis on the need to tackle deepening spatial and ecological injustices for the achievement of a 'just' and 'green' Europe.'[43]. In addition to such general formulations, more specific concerns were also raised. For example, Cotella & Toto[44] expressed the opinion that 'Much more than its predecessors, the TA 2030 conveys the message of its proponents also outside the EU area, encouraging the neighbouring countries to notice them and put them into practice at all territorial levels and scales.' Moreover, the simplification of Territorial Agenda 2030 policy messages was appreciated.[45] Several authors regretted that the only means of implementing Territorial Agenda 2030 relate to communication, cooperation and persuasion.[46] There are also references to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased role of territorial cohesion in the recovery process due to the need for different actions for different types of territories.[47] Other publications underlined the need for policy territorialisation (as highlighted by the

[41] 'Administrative Capacity and the Territorial Effects of EU Support to Firms: A Two-Step Analysis', *Regional Studies*, 2022, pp. 1–14, doi:10.1080/00343404.2022.2109613.

[42] Neto Henriques and others; Lela Tijanic, 'Regions with Geographical Specificities and Territorial Cohesion in the European Union', ed. by Jelena Janusevic, Paul Hopkinson, and Irena Pandza Bajs, *International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development*, 88, 2022, pp. 214–22.

[43] *Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion*, ed. by Eduardo Medeiros, The Urban Book Series (Springer International Publishing, 2023), doi:10.1007/978-3-031-26228-9.

[44] 'Foreword: Territorial Governance in the Western Balkans: Multi-Scalar Approaches and Perspectives', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 28.2 (2021), pp. 5–20, doi:10.18778/1231-1952.28.2.01.

[45] Eduardo Medeiros, 'Development Clusters for Small Places and Rural Development for Territorial Cohesion?', *Sustainability*, 14.1 (2021), p. 84, doi:10.3390/su14010084.

[46] Estelle Evrard and Peter Schmitt, 'Do New Brooms Sweep Clean? Striving for "A Just Europe" in the Territorial Agenda 2030', *European Planning Studies*, 2023, pp. 1–19, doi:10.1080/09654313.2023.2254329; Jakubowski and Miszczuk; Neto Henriques and others.

[47] Panagiotis Artelaris and George Mavrommatis, 'Territorial Cohesion, the COVID-19 Crisis and the Urban Paradox: Future Challenges in Urbanization and Economic Agglomeration', *REGION*, 9.1 (2022), pp. 135–46, doi:10.18335/region.v9i1.403.

Territorial Agenda 2030).[48] Applying a functional approach to EU-supported policymaking[49], the importance of sub-national policies and actions [50], as well as integrated tools such as ITI or CLLD for the implementation of the Agenda, by [51] They also considered EU strategic guidelines and documents, such as the European Green Deal, Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, Just Transition Mechanism, as an 'opportunity to promote synergies between the Territorial Agenda and EU strategies and policies'.[52] Neto et al.[53,], who provide the most comprehensive critique of Territorial Agenda 2030, however, claim that 'the territorial agenda doesn't address why the message assumes a territorial perspective'.

Of five publications that mentioned pilot actions,[54] three praised the Agenda for initiating pilot projects relevant to the topic of the paper (climate change and rural areas). For instance, Greiving & Fleischhauer[55] expressed their gratitude that 'the new Territorial Agenda 2030 identifies climate change as one of the action fields and explicitly integrates it into the pilot actions of climate action in Alpine towns as well as climate-change adaptation and resilience through landscape transition.' For Nikolova et al.[56], 'It is noteworthy that 25% of the identified good practices are aimed at ensuring sustainable development of rural areas'. Medeiros[57] appreciates the pilot action named Small Places Matter as stressing 'the vital role of 'small towns and villages in the development of integrated territorial development processes, strengthening the territorial coordination of policies and cooperation between territories' and built on the rationale that a vast network of stakeholders is focused on developing small places'. A more nuanced description of the pilot actions is provided by the two papers with Territorial Agenda 2030 focus. Böhme & Redlich[58] provide the most comprehensive picture of the pilot projects, but this is not surprising as this is the publication introducing the Territorial Agenda 2030 to the scientific community and practitioners. The authors consider the implementation concept as an added value of Territorial Agenda 2030. According to their opinion 'Implementation actions have been able to concretise the Territorial Agenda ambitions. Working closely with the local level they are impactful in concrete terms. They also show that the abstract and multifaceted concept of cohesion can be put into practice'.[59] Moreover, Evrard & Schmitt[60] underline that the pilot actions demonstrate the importance of the place-based approach.

[48] Nicola Camatti and others, 'The Relevance of the TerritorialDimension in EU Policies and the Role of Tourism', *Tourism*, 70.4 (2022), pp. 555–70, doi:10.37741/t.70.4.2; Pedro Chamusca and others, 'Territorial Cohesion: Discussing the Mismatch between Conceptual Definitions and the Understanding of Local and Intra-Regional Public Decision-Makers', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2022, pp. 1–23, doi:10.1080/21622671.2022.2044899.

[49] Carlotta Fioretti and Martina Pertoldi, 'Exploring the Functional Area Approach in EU Urban Strategies', *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*, 4.2 (2020), pp. 146–62, doi:10.24306/TrAESOP.2020.02.006; Christian Lüer and Kai Böhme, 'Reenergizing European Spatial Planning', *Planning Practice & Research*, 2020, pp. 1–15, doi:10.1080/02697459.2020.1852675.

[50] Homutiņins, Šipilova, and Aleksejeva; Maria Kola-Bezka, 'Think Global Act Local: In Search for Ways to Increase the Engagement of Local Communities in Energy Transition', *Energy Reports*, 9 (2023), pp. 1668–83, doi:10.1016/j.egyr.2022.12.143; John R. Moodie and others, 'Territorial Governance and Smart Specialisation: Empowering the Sub-National Level in EU Regional Policy', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2021, pp. 1–21, doi:10.1080/21622671.2021.1905542.

[51] Vratislav Havlík, 'The Europeanization of Territoriality and Its Limits: The Territorial Dimension of EU Cohesion Policy and Its Varying Implementation', *European Planning Studies*, 31.4 (2023), pp. 802–21, doi:10.1080/09654313.2022.2091407; Moodie and others.

[52] Tijanic.

[53] Neto Henriques and others.

[54] Böhme and Redlich; Evrard and Schmitt; Greiving and Fleischhauer; Medeiros, 'Development Clusters for Small Places and Rural Development for Territorial Cohesion?'; Marina Nikolova and others, 'Theoretical and Methodological Basis in the Management of Sustainable Development of Rural Territories in the Republic of Bulgaria', *Agricultural Sciences*, 14.34 (2022), pp. 37–48, doi:10.22620/agrisci.2022.34.005.

[55] Greiving and Fleischhauer.

[56] Nikolova and others.

[57] Medeiros, 'Development Clusters for Small Places and Rural Development for Territorial Cohesion?'

[58] Böhme and Redlich.

[59] Böhme and Redlich.

[60] Evrard and Schmitt.

Under the first objective of the Territorial Agenda 2030, the most popular priority concerns a balanced Europe. It is present in 14 publications, whereas the other two priorities are mentioned in only 5 publications each. This suggests that spatial differentiations remain significant concerns within the EU. References are generally descriptive in nature. For instance, Artelaris & Mavrommatis[61] inform that 'The increase in, and need to limit, spatial inequalities among EU localities have lately been highlighted in several official EU documents, such as the Territorial Agenda 2030.' Also, Camatti et al.[62] provide direct quotations from Territorial Agenda 2030. Several authors analyse this priority in the context of urban-rural differences and the concept of polycentricity [63] However, there are some interesting observations as well. Worth mentioning is the critique by Davoudi [64] which claimed that the Territorial Agenda 2030 'does not seem to have moved from a mere empirical observation of inequalities towards indicating a moral position on justice.' Also, Evrard & Schmitt[65] praise the Territorial Agenda 2030 for frequent use of the policy keyword 'justice' but criticise it for not defining 'what a Just Europe may mean more concretely.' They are echoed by Neto et al.[66], who find 'a considerable lack of definition of what is meant by just and justice.' Much more positive are Böhme & Redlich[67], who underline that the Territorial Agenda 2030 has 'shifted from the basic idea of balanced territorial development to much more fundamental ideas on cohesion and the importance of cohesion for the future of Europe. This is already expressed in the subtitle 'a future for all places' and runs through the entire document.' This shift (already mentioned in the previous paragraph) is considered as an important added value of the Territorial Agenda 2030 in comparison to its predecessors.

The other two priorities of 'Just Europe' are less popular as research topics. The information in the screened literature concerning integration beyond border priority is descriptive and factual. Even Böhme & Redlich[68] state that 'The Territorial Agenda 2030 advocates for… easier living and working conditions across national borders.' The same short-coming concerns the functional regions priority. Scientific discourse related to the Territorial Agenda 2030 is dominated by various concepts of functionality, fuzzy delineation, and the essence of functional areas around smaller settlements.

Key observation: The scientific discourse on the Territorial Agenda 2030 is dominated by the issue of spatial imbalances. The Territorial Agenda 2030 has managed to reformulate it into the catchier concept of 'spatial justice' or 'socio-territorial cohesion' by bringing together places and societal groups.

Under the second objective, the most popular priority was a healthy environment, whereas the other two priorities are almost absent (3 publications for each). In the latter, passive/descriptive references prevail, related more to resilient local economies than to circularity itself. For example, Medeiros quotes the Territorial Agenda 2030 that small places or small urban settlements can 'benefit from a circular economy in terms of repair, reuse, and sharing activities at the local and regional level'[69]. Böhme &

[61] Artelaris and Mavrommatis.

[62] Camatti and others.

[63] Holger Magel and Uchendu Eugene Chigbu, 'Territorial Justice and Equivalent Living Conditions: Insights Fromm the NEw Paradigm of Territorial Development in Germany', in *LAND MATTERS Taking Stock and Looking Ahead. Selected Experiences in Emmory of Rafael Crecente*, ed. by David Miranda Barrós (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Servizo de Publicacións e Intercambio Científico, 2021), pp. 75–102 <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Uchendu-Chigbu/publication/361037647_Territorial_justice_and_equivalent_living_conditions_Insights_from_the_new_paradigm_of_territorial_development_in_Germany/links/6298d69aa3fe3e3df856602b/Territorial-justice-and-equivalent-living-conditions-Insights-from-the-new-paradigm-of-territorial-development-in-Germany.pdf#page=75>; Medeiros, 'Development Clusters for Small Places and Rural Development for Territorial Cohesion?'

[64] 'Territorial Agenda 2030 and a "Just Europe" Speech at Conference', *Discussion Forum for Spatial Development*, MORO-Informationen, 14.9 (2020), pp. 13–17.

[65] Evrard and Schmitt.

[66] Neto Henriques and others.

[67] Böhme and Redlich.

[68] Böhme and Redlich.

[69] Medeiros, 'Development Clusters for Small Places and Rural Development for Territorial Cohesion?'

Redlich[70] maintain that the 'priority on 'sustainable digital and physical connectivity of places' contains already elements which are of relevance for the discussion on 'digital cohesion'. Two publications underline the contribution of internet connections to spatial justice due to improved access to services, particularly in remote sparsely populated areas.[71]

Key observation: The research on Territorial Agenda 2030 offers a radical shift to attention on implementation, particularly in the context of territorial cohesion and other spatially sensitive policies/actions. However, the main hindrance lies in the very general/imprecise nature of the key concepts in the Territorial Agenda 2030.

3.1.3 Improved implementation

Suggestions for improvement are scarce. The majority relate to putting priorities into action. However, such suggestions miss several priorities: functional regions, integration beyond border, circular economy, and sustainable connections. Improvements were proposed in 11 papers, with the most active in this regard being Evrard & Schmitt[72], who postulated several advancements such as:

- Keeping the 'shift towards a 'just' Europe /../ to promote a semantic alignment with the broader political debate and policy turn at the European level.'
- Making 'the territorial dimension clearer in relation to sector policies.'
- Tightening 'connections with the law, i.e., the legal basis of a policy framework for action' (better alignment with the sources of funding).
- Relying more broadly on the Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation on grassroots initiatives such as the 'New European Bauhaus initiative.'

As a key condition for the success of pilot actions, the authors consider facilitating policy learning elsewhere. They state, 'the question is not only how to mobilise and communicate lessons from such pilot actions; key actors must also consider how to adjust and prepare such good practice for implementation locally in other territorial and institutional contexts.'

Other authors [73] advocate for a place-based approach and strengthening the role of cohesion policy ('the European vision for the Union, in which Cohesion Policy is the main influence'). Chigbu et al.[74], feel that implementation of the 'Just Europe' objective would require the development of visions for all regions in the EU following 'four universal dimensions of justices: including distribution justice, procedural justice, equality of opportunities, and intergenerational justice.' Others proposed the use of regional development strategies for a similar purpose, particularly for preventing 'the decline of SGI in rural areas through specific future-oriented projects'.[75] Davoudi[76] argues for 'replacing the top-down, formula-based transfer of cohesion funds, which sometimes are spent on underused and unwanted infrastructure projects, with tailor-made, place-specific measures that are designed from the ground up.' Degele & Pedregal[77] formulated three suggestions: (a) territorialisation of nature conservation, (b) broadening and deepening the sense of justice, and (c) promoting a critical–epistemological discussion.

[70] Böhme and Redlich.

[71] Chamusca and others; Jakubowski and Miszczuk.

[72] Evrard and Schmitt.

[73] Ricardo C. Dias, Paulo C. Seixas, and Nadine Lobner, 'State Transformations through Public, Multilevel, and Territorial Governance in European Union: Towards a Metagovernance Paradigm', *European Policy Analysis*, 8.4 (2022), pp. 467–83, doi:10.1002/epa2.1163.

[74] Chigbu, Klaus, and Magel.

[75] Saskia Gall-Roehrig and others, 'Service of General Interest in the Rhenish Coal-Mining Area in Context of Structural Change', *Land*, 11.7 (2022), p. 956, doi:10.3390/land11070956.

[76] Davoudi.

[77] 'North–South Dialogue on Territorial Policies and Discourses: Insights for the Future of Nature Conservation', *Land*, 11.7 (2022), p. 994, doi:10.3390/land11070994.

Greiving & Fleischhauer[78] postulate implementation of the priority of a healthy environment by 'mainstreaming resilience, climate-change adaptation, and environmental justice in sectoral policies.' In the Medeiros monograph[79], Daly postulates an 'ontological shift from a 'place-based' to an 'adaptation-based' territorial development paradigm.' However, none of these authors describe in-depth how it should be done in practice.

The most comprehensive and complex suggestions are from Böhme & Redlich[80], postulating:

- Activating the potential of national spatial planning programmes and projects for Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation.
- Better planning education for increasing awareness and knowledge about the territorial dimension of policy-making.
- Applying a mission economy approach to engage a wide range of stakeholders in implementation.
- Label place-based projects and programmes from all sectors that implement Territorial Agenda 2030 ideas.
- Organise regular Territorial Agenda conferences by ESPON to maintain momentum and results of the pilot actions.
- Keeping the momentum and maintaining the results of the pilot actions, they also suggest extending pilot actions beyond the local level and initiating new pilot actions.
- Maintaining the results after official completion of the action (systemic approach to implementation strengthening the longevity of activities).

Some improvements proposed by Böhme & Redlich match those formulated by Evrard & Schmitt[81], and echo those formulated earlier by Lüer & Böhme[82]. However, in this latter publication, there is also a clear plea for the coordinating role of spatial planning that might 'shape and guide Cohesion Policy in acknowledging and promoting the diversity/…/ and inject the place-based approach in Cohesion Policy formulation.'

Finally, Neto et al.[83] offer an important observation. They argue that the Territorial Agenda 2030, if genuinely committed to a balanced Europe, should better recognise the political context in which cooperation between territories is pursued, since without that 'cooperation between territories which are at different stages of development may be exploitative, or it may reinforce the existing spatial and social divisions.'

Key observation: In the scientific discourse on the Territorial Agenda 2030, the descriptive and informative approach prevails. There are only a few suggestions on how to improve implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. With few exceptions, they are general and do not offer genuine breakthroughs. They mainly rely on soft action, although there is a 'hidden' sentiment towards better alignment between a member state driven Territorial Agenda 2030 process and EU and national policymaking (distribution of funds).

3.1.4 Concrete actions / examples

Concrete actions and examples of implementation are provided in only one paper.[84] The authors note that most pilot actions are implemented under the 'Just Europe' objective, and even those related to the 'Green Europe' have elements linked to the issue of justice. The most popular fields of pilot actions

[78] Greiving and Fleischhauer.

[79] *Public Policies for Territorial Cohesion*.

[80] Böhme and Redlich.

[81] Evrard and Schmitt.

[82] Lüer and Böhme.

[83] Neto Henriques and others.

[84] Böhme and Redlich.

are: 'Balanced Europe', 'Functional regions', and 'Healthy Environment'. They conclude 'It is noticeable that two of three 'Green Europe' priorities have not been addressed so far by pilot actions'. However, even in this publication, one cannot find an evaluation of the progress and success of the implementation of targeted priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030 by pilot actions and testing new territorial approaches. A key reason is that Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions have been completed only recently. It will take time to analyse and disseminate the results to the epistemic community. However, Böhme & Redlich[85] have managed to examine other initiatives implementing Territorial Agenda 2030. They mention the compilation for the Territorial Agenda 2030[86], which identified 52 additional existing initiatives that contribute to implementing Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities (many Interreg projects executed by local actors). Additionally, Interact has launched an initiative on 'Bringing territoriality into Interreg' to strengthen the relationship between Interreg programmes and Territorial Agenda 2030 implementation, [87]. This is an important opening that can significantly strengthen implementation of Territorial Agenda 2030 beyond the pilot projects. All these initiatives show that Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities are implemented by various stakeholders, although many may not be aware that they pursue the Agenda. Thus, implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 might be conditioned by how much the Agenda emphasises important policy goals or challenges, already prioritised by policymakers and the general public. In this context, a shift from 'Balanced Europe' to the more appealing concept of a 'Just Europe' seems to be in the right direction.

Key observation: More in-depth analysis of implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is scarce and needs to be pursued by the scientific community regarding the entire Territorial Agenda 2030 and its separate priorities.

3.1.5 Summary of key findings

Despite scarce evidence, the literature offers some insight into barriers that prevent the Territorial Agenda 2030 from becoming a game changer and suggests some solutions.

The first barrier that the concept of territorial cohesion and Territorial Agenda 2030 objectives are not fully defined. Links are missing between Territorial Agenda 2030 and other EU policies as is a systemic approach to territorial development.

The second barrier is that there is no designated EU institution responsible for implementing and monitoring the Territorial Agenda 2030. The documents do not specify how objectives are going to be achieved, who is responsible for their implementation, or the monitoring mechanism. Links to sector policies are weak. No are policy instruments identified and there is no designated budget for implementation. There is also no system of monitoring or reporting for non-compliance with Territorial Agenda 2030 objectives.

The third barrier is financial. The Territorial Agenda 2030 is not accompanied by a proper financial instrument. Better alignment with existing funds was suggested in some publications.

The fourth barrier is the limited funding for research to address the objectives and priorities, which does not inspire new research projects. Few scientists specialise in researching the Territorial Agenda

[85] Böhme and Redlich.

[86] BMI, *Implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030 - Examples for a Territorial Approach in Policy Design and Delivery* (Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, 2020).

[87] Philipp Schwartz and Bernhard Schausberger, *Territorial Package: Bringing Territoriality into Interreg* (INTERACT, 2022) <https://www.interact-eu.net/media/219/download/2022-03-11%20Territorial%20Package%20%281%29.pdf?v=1> [accessed 10 April 2024].

2030. This is one reason for scarce scientific evidence of evaluating concrete actions inspired by the Territorial Agenda 2030 or in line with its priorities.

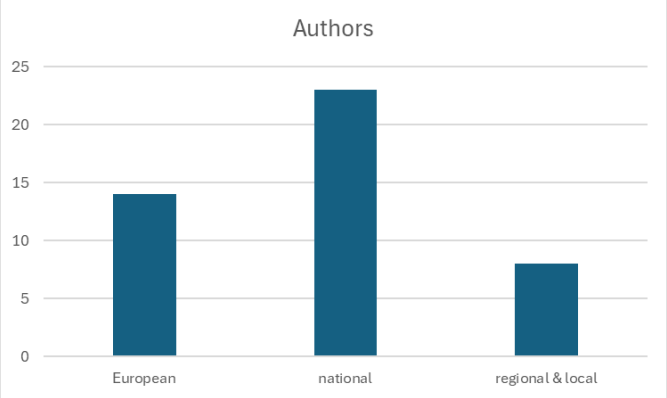
Despite all these barriers, some scientists do not doubt the potential of the Territorial Agenda 2030 to become a policy game-changer. They believe that if properly implemented, it will enhance the territorial cohesion of EU territories, support the transition towards a circular and carbon-neutral economy, and reinforce European integration.

3.2 Review of policy document

Number of documents, authors and policy areas. At the cut-off date of 31 July, 47 policy documents were found that mentioned the Territorial Agenda 2030. Different versions or preparatory documents of the same policy document were not counted, nor documents produced under NTCCP, such as pilot study reports.

Geographical spread and authors. Of these 47 documents, 14 came from European or European-wide institutions such as the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre, European Committee of the Regions and Interact. Two are intergovernmental (New Leipzig Charter and Ljubljana Agreement). 23 are national, including Partnership Agreements and Interreg Programmes and 8 are produced by regional or local entities.

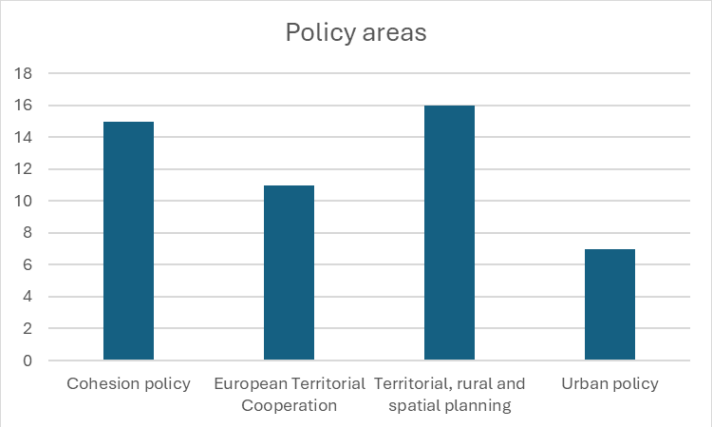
Figure 3.1 Document authors by government level



Of the national documents, five came from the Czech Republic, 6 from Romania and 5 from Sweden. The documents in Sweden are mostly regional, those in Romania are but one all cross-border or operational programmes, while in the Czech Republic they concern national policy and guidance documents.

Types of documents. Of the documents, 31 are 'softer' such as guidance, opinions, input papers, working documents, reports, position papers, communications and policy statements. More binding policy documents like Operational Programmes, strategies, action plans or Partnership Agreements account for roughly the other 16. The table below shows which policy areas stand out.

Figure 3.2 Documents classified by policy area



3.2.1 Cohesion Policy – Partnership Agreements and regional development programmes

15 policy documents mention the Territorial Agenda 2030 in direct relation to Cohesion Policy.

At EU level there are no references to the Territorial Agenda 2030 in Cohesion Policy regulations or guidance, nor in Cohesion reports. Partnership Agreements from Portugal, Italy and Slovenia mention the Territorial Agenda 2030 explicitly, and the Swedish region of Västernorrland mentions it in the input to the national Partnership Agreement.

Czechia produced guidance on the territorial dimension in its operational programmes 2021+ mentioning the Territorial Agenda 2030, In Greece it was mentioned in national guidelines for the preparation and selection of the Sustainable Urban Development strategies.

Both the Romanian OP West 2021-2027 and the Hungarian Territorial and Settlement Development Operational Programme Plus (2021-2027) refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030, as does analysis of the recovery and resilience plan of Croatia in a Commission Staff Working Paper.

Notably, opinions from the German ministerial conference on spatial planning, the European parliament and the draft opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee call for a stronger link between the Territorial Agenda 2030 and Cohesion Policy.

3.2.2 Cohesion Policy – European Territorial Cooperation Programmes and Strategies

11 policy documents relate specifically to the ETC strand of Cohesion Policy.

The Territorial Agenda 2030 is mentioned in ETC policy with a dedicated fiche in the Territorial Package produced by Interact, in the EU Action Plans for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region, in a position paper for the MED programme coordinated by the Region of Crete (Greece), in an overview of Transnational and Interregional Cooperation in Bavaria and in federal guidelines for project applicants for ETC programmes (both Germany).

Finally, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is also mentioned in scoping papers, strategic environmental assessments and programme documents for several Interreg programmes:

- Romania – Hungary
- Romania – Serbia

- Romania – Bulgaria
- Norway - Sweden

3.2.3 Spatial planning and Rural and territorial development

A third group of policy documents that mention the Territorial Agenda 2030 deal with rural development, territorial development or spatial planning (16 in total).

At EU level, several documents that mention the Territorial Agenda 2030 are about rural and territorial development policy. These include the Rural Vision and its recent (2024) stocktaking of key achievements and ways forward, the Rural Toolkit and the JRC publications Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies, and Policy Atlas of Sustainable Urban Development for Small Urban Areas. CoR has issued an opinion and a working document on equivalent standards of living and small urban areas as key actors to manage the just transition, which both mention the Territorial Agenda 2030.

Other than a Swedish report on local development and territorial instruments there were no other examples that mentioned the Territorial Agenda 2030 in national rural development plans or reports.

At national and regional level there are territorial and spatial planning strategies that mention the Territorial Agenda 2030. These are in Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Slovenia and Romania.

For national spatial planning strategies several examples in Portugal, Germany, Poland and Hungary of spatial plans, regional development plans or transport policies refer to the Territorial Agenda 2020 and are still in force, or in the process of being updated.

One document worth mentioning is the Federal Government response to the minor interpellation by Carolin Bachmann, Marc Bernhard, Roger Beckamp, other Members of Parliament and the AfD Group. Here the German federal government answer questions regarding subsidiarity, European spatial planning and Territorial Agenda 2030 principles.

3.2.4 Urban policy

As a last group 7 policy document refer to urban policy. The intergovernmental New Leipzig Charter and Ljubljana Agreement refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030, and it is also mentioned in the JRC Policy Atlas of Sustainable Urban Development for Small Urban Areas and the CoR input paper on Cities fostering democracy in the European Union - Urban perspectives for the Conference on the Future of Europe.

At national level there are Czechia documents on Policy of architecture and building culture (2022) and Principles of urban policy of the Czech Republic (2023). There is also a draft version of the National Urban Policy 2030 for Poland.

No references were found to the Territorial Agenda 2030 in European or national transport or environmental policy documents, with only one reference in a Flemish environmental report.

3.2.5 Type of references

There is a clear distinction between documents that refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030 a few times and documents where it is very present or even takes centre stage.

The group of limited references is by far the largest. Of the 47 documents, 36 refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030 up to three times. Here it is usually mentioned in a list with other policy documents, as a brief description of a relevant document or because the document is in line with Territorial Agenda

2030 principles. However, also this group contains some interesting information on how the Territorial Agenda 2030 is used.

A few documents mention the TA2030 more often. These include the Interreg programme IPA Romania – Serbia 2021 – 2027, the Czech standing conference agenda and the Czech guidance on the territorial dimension in operational programmes 2021+, German federal guidelines for project applicants for ETC programmes and the opinion of the CoR on equivalent standards of living.

The Swedish region Västernorrland refers to the Territorial Agenda 2030 in input to the national Partnership Agreement:

Within Policy Objective 5, RVN calls for a definition of 'Sustainable Cities' that includes all types of communities, small and large. A one-sided focus on sustainable urban development misses the purpose of EU cohesion policy - to strengthen social and economic cohesion and create sustainable development throughout the country. More cohesive urban planning with innovative and smart solutions is a development potential for all types of communities and a prerequisite for sustainable development in all parts of the country. This is also underlined by the EU's Territorial Agenda 2030.

The Czech documents stress the territorial dimension of sectoral policies and TIAs. The Interreg document highlights a place-based approach, multi-level governance, strategic orientations for territorial development, strengthening the territorial dimension of policies and pilot actions. The German guidelines explain that Territorial Agenda 2030 themes are the strategic orientation for the German funding programme and the opinion demands a stronger link between the Territorial Agenda 2030 and Cohesion Policy to provide Cohesion Policy with a territorial strategic guiding framework to achieve a Green and Just Europe where no territory would lag behind.

Even though very few spatial planning strategies refer to the Territorial Agenda 2030, two mention it often. The draft of the Spatial Development concept of Wallonia mentions it eight times, the Austrian Spatial Development concept ÖREK 2030, 10 times.

ÖREK 2030 describes how the Territorial Agenda 2030 provides a European framework for territorial development and contains for the first time a more operational component: pilot actions. Theme-wise Territorial Agenda 2030 is mentioned in relation to a future for all places and the importance of creating a circular economy. The Walloon Spatial Development concept stresses the digital and green priorities, stipulates that cross-border cooperation should be in line with Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities and points to concepts of just territorial development, functional regions, cross-border integration and a green, circular, healthy environment with sustainable land use and net zero soil sealing.

Documents that refer most to the Territorial Agenda 2030 are those where it is the central topic. These include the (draft) opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (30) and the resolution from the European Parliament on the Implementation of territorial development (CPR, Title III, Chapter II) and its application in the European Territorial Agenda 2030 (31), and the answer from the German federal government on a parliament interpellation (21).

The Resolution argues that an integrated approach to territorial development as highlighted by the Territorial Agenda 2030 is crucial in Cohesion Policy. However, it is an intergovernmental declaration with no direct legal, financial or institutional implementation instruments. [...] The European Parliament should therefore reflect on how to make the best use of the Territorial Agenda and consider the inclusion of its priorities in EU legislative processes (page 5).

The Resolution ends with the call to simplify the administrative process for managing funds, to include Territorial Agenda 2030 priorities in the legislative instruments and operational programmes of cohesion policy funds, and further promote the involvement of municipalities, regions and their representative associations during the various stages of implementing territorial instruments (p6).

Strengthening the link between Territorial Agenda 2030 principles and priorities with Cohesion Policy is also the topic of the resolution of the German Ministerial Conference for Spatial Planning. The draft opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adds as a future perspectives strategic initiatives and actions to enable all European regions to adapt in a sustainable and inclusive manner to the effects of demographic change, strengthening the civic approach and a stronger integrated approach of the Territorial Agenda 2030 itself.

Two documents are clearly written to support stakeholders applying integrated territorial development, and by extension Territorial Agenda 2030 principles and priorities: the JRC Handbook of Territorial and Local Development Strategies (12 references) and the Territorial Package by Interact (12 references).

Handbook

The Handbook aims to present territorial and local stakeholders with good practices on how to design, finance and implement strategies. It refers to the Territorial Agenda 2030 in its introduction the integrated approach to territorial development. It describes the policy context of the Handbook with an extensive summary of the Territorial Agenda 2030. In the chapter on strategy, the importance of strategic spatial planning in territorial cohesion is highlighted, which is mirrored in the Territorial Agenda 2030 (p16).

It mentions Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions, a stronger territorial focus with its Green Europe objective in the Territorial Agenda 2030, the importance of enduring cross-border cooperation and it describes the Interact Territorial Package.

Later in the Handbook the focus is again on the integrated place-based approach advocated by the Territorial Agenda 2030 and it describes the Commission and BBSR publication on implementation examples of the Territorial Agenda.

Territorial Package

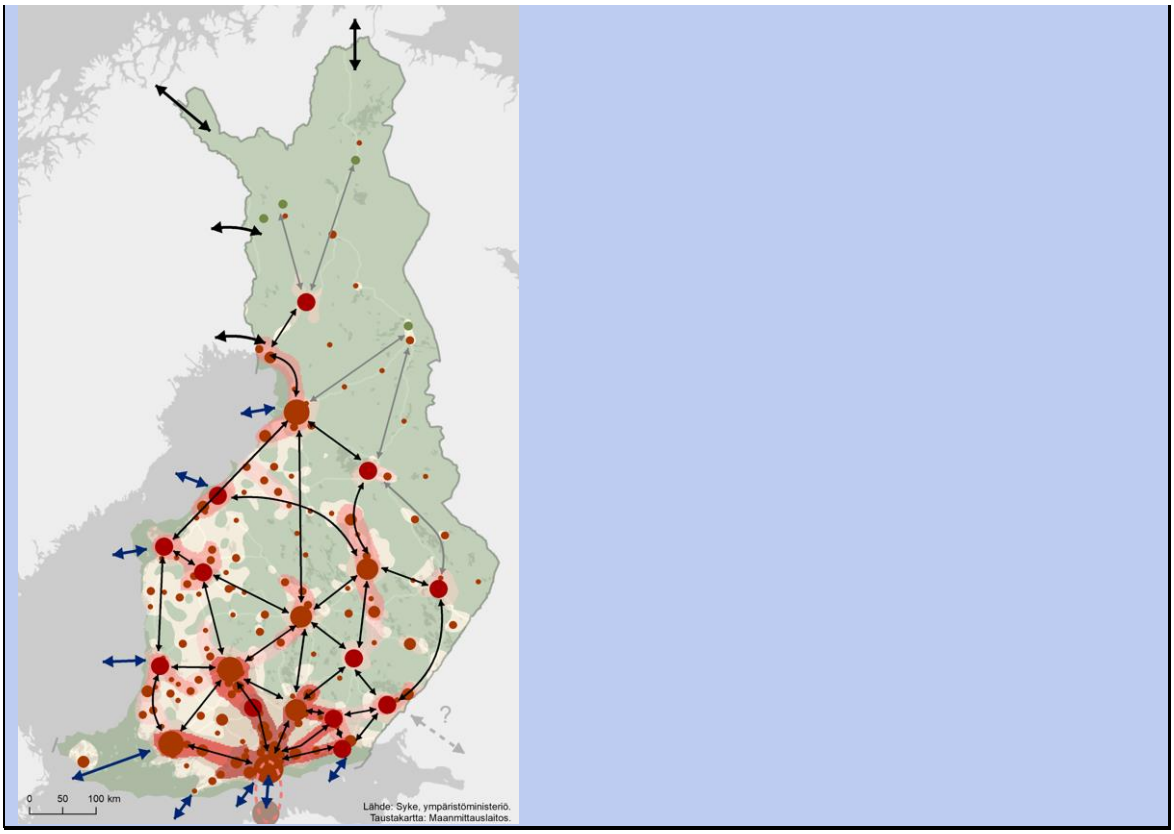
The Interact Territorial Package supports Interreg practitioners in their everyday work. But it also provides information and inspiration for other territorial actors. Among the seven fiches that address territorial aspects, one is Fiche #4 – Interreg and the Territorial Agenda 2030.

Here the Territorial Agenda 2030 and especially its priorities and pilot actions are mentioned as an inspiration for Interreg programmes. Several times it is put forward that by being more territorial, Interreg programmes can enlarge their actor-base, and vice-versa. Pilot action participants could introduce Interreg representatives to new actors in the field of planning as well as local and regional development. Interreg programmes could capitalise on pilot actions and increase the visibility and political interest for their programmes by linking to the Territorial Agenda 2030.

Finally, one document did not reference the Territorial Agenda 2030 but was inspired by it according to the policy officer. Several survey respondents mentioned documents they thought referenced the Territorial Agenda 2030, but in the end didn't.

Development perspective of land use in Finland– a path to sustainable regional and urban structure

Published in 2024 this sets out a development structure for Finland. It promotes a polycentric and networked regional structure and sustainable urban development. Key concepts are to draw on the strength of different areas, location independence strengthened by digitalisation, networking and division of labour between urban regions, regional town and rural areas use their strengths in interaction with other regions, as well as functional national and international connections.



3.3 Survey 'Territorial Agenda 2030 uptake'

Stocktaking of the Territorial Agenda 2030 involved two surveys. One was addressed to a wider audience to gather as many responses as possible and obtain a broad overview of the uptake, while the other was targeted at stakeholders involved in Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions. The surveys were launched on 1 March 2024. The survey on the uptake was distributed to partners from the NTCPP, ESPON and Interact and was also shared through social media channels. The survey on the pilot actions was sent directly to the lead partners.

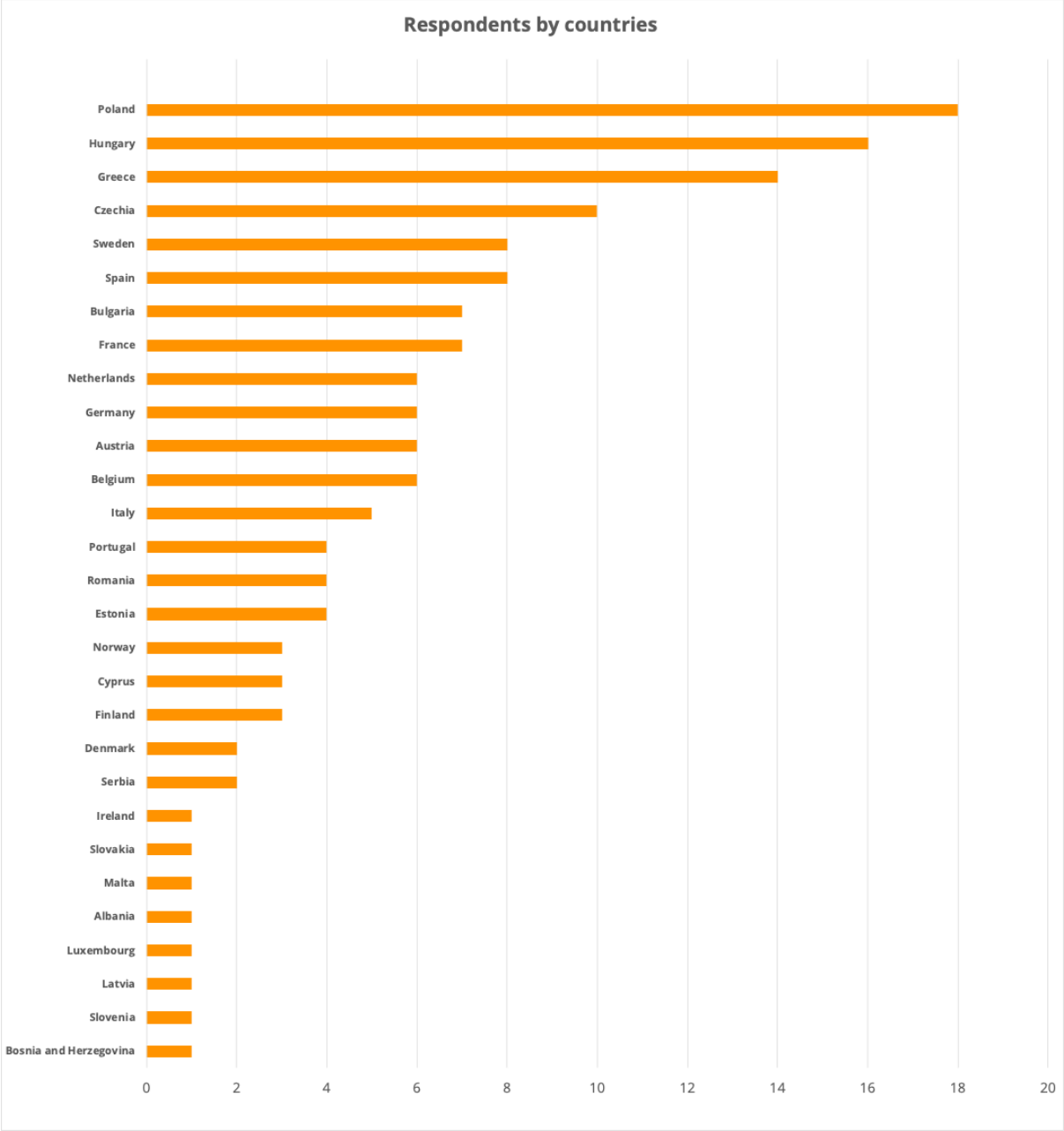
The surveys remained open until 31 May 2024. The final results are presented below. The responses reflect participants' views and experiences, their knowledge and implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030, and their perception of its implementation and communication.

There were 150 respondents to the survey on the uptake of the Territorial Agenda 2030. This consisted of 18 questions, addressing the relevance and changes over the past three years in the key principles and thematic objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030, stakeholder involvement and the use of territorial tools. The aim of the survey is to assess how relevant the content of the Territorial Agenda 2030 remains and how the uptake of its elements has evolved over the three years of its implementation.

3.3.1 Who answered the survey

Diverse country representation, from 29 countries in total. Most replies come from Poland, Hungary and Greece followed by Czechia, Sweden and Spain. Additionally, four non-EU member states—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Norway and Serbia—also provided input. However, no responses were received from Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, or Switzerland (Figure 3.3).

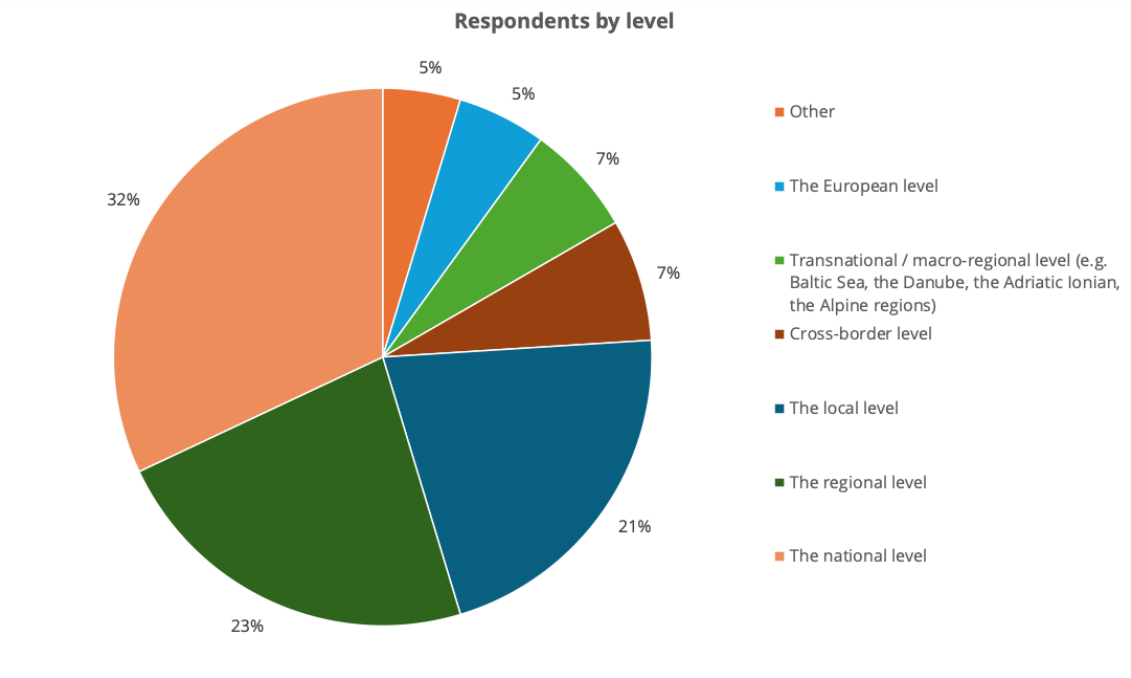
Figure 3.3 Respondents by countries



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

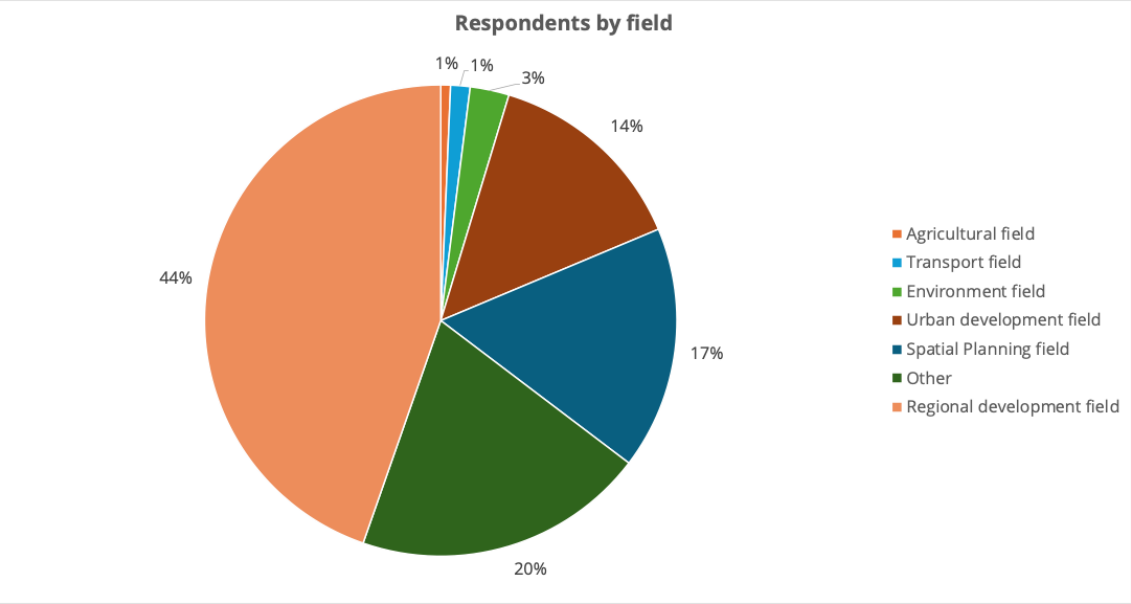
Dominance of national level. About one third of respondents are from the national level, followed by 23% from the regional level and 21% from the local level. 14% of respondents come from the field of territorial cooperation and 5% from the European level (Figure 3.4). National level respondents represent various ministries, such as the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture, among others.

Figure 3.4 Respondents by level



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Figure 3.5 Respondents by field



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Respondents mainly represent regional development, urban development and spatial planning. Responses were from individuals active in regional development (44%), urban development (14%), and spatial planning (17%). This aligns with the academic literature, which underscores the prominence of the Territorial Agenda discourse within the spatial planning discipline (Figure 3.5).

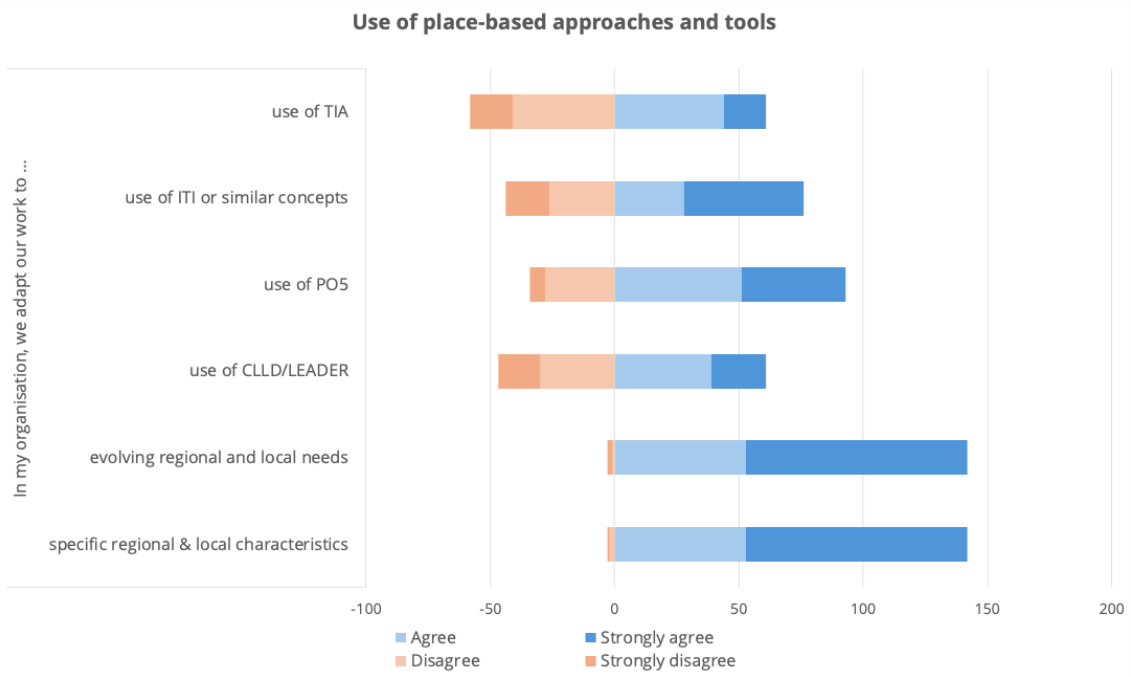
3.3.2 Use of Territorial Agenda 2030 key principles

The following section presents the survey findings in relation to key Territorial Agenda 2030 principles, focusing on how much these principles are used by participants.

Local and regional characteristics are the most common link to the Territorial Agenda 2030. A key aspect of implementing the Territorial Agenda 2030 is the use of place-based approaches and tools. Specific local and regional characteristics and evolving needs are the most commonly used place-based approaches and tools among respondents (Figure 3.6). Additionally, respondents reported that the use of these two elements has increased over the last three years, i.e. since adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (Figure 3.7).

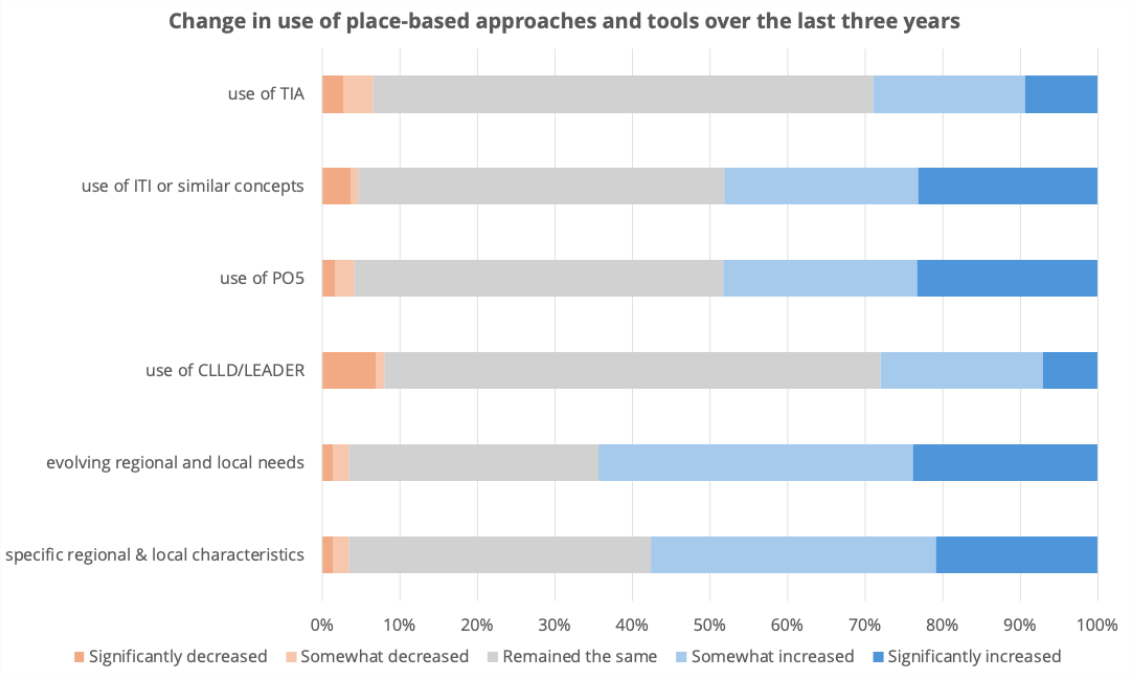
The use of territorial tools has either increased or remained the same over the last three years. Although CLLD/LEADER was considered an up-and-coming tool for applying Territorial Agenda objectives about 10 years ago (Böhme et al., 2015), its use has decreased the most. TIAs have largely remained the same over the last three years (Figure 3.7). The open text answers concerning principles of the Territorial Agenda reveal varying levels of integration and impact across different regions and sectors. Some authorities such as Portugal's Directorate-General for Territory has sought to align its policies and strategies with Territorial Agenda 2030 principles. On the other hand, other authorities like Estonia's Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture and Denmark's Agency for Planning and Rural Development, have independently implemented similar principles due to the nature of their work, without direct guidance from the Territorial Agenda 2030. For example, Estonia's Ministry of Regional Affairs and Agriculture applies these principles in their daily tasks, such as designing and implementing regional development policies and related interventions. This approach is driven by the demands of their work rather than adherence to the Territorial Agenda 2030, which they have not consciously followed.

Figure 3.6 Use of place-based approaches and tools



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Figure 3.7 Change in use of place-based approaches and tools



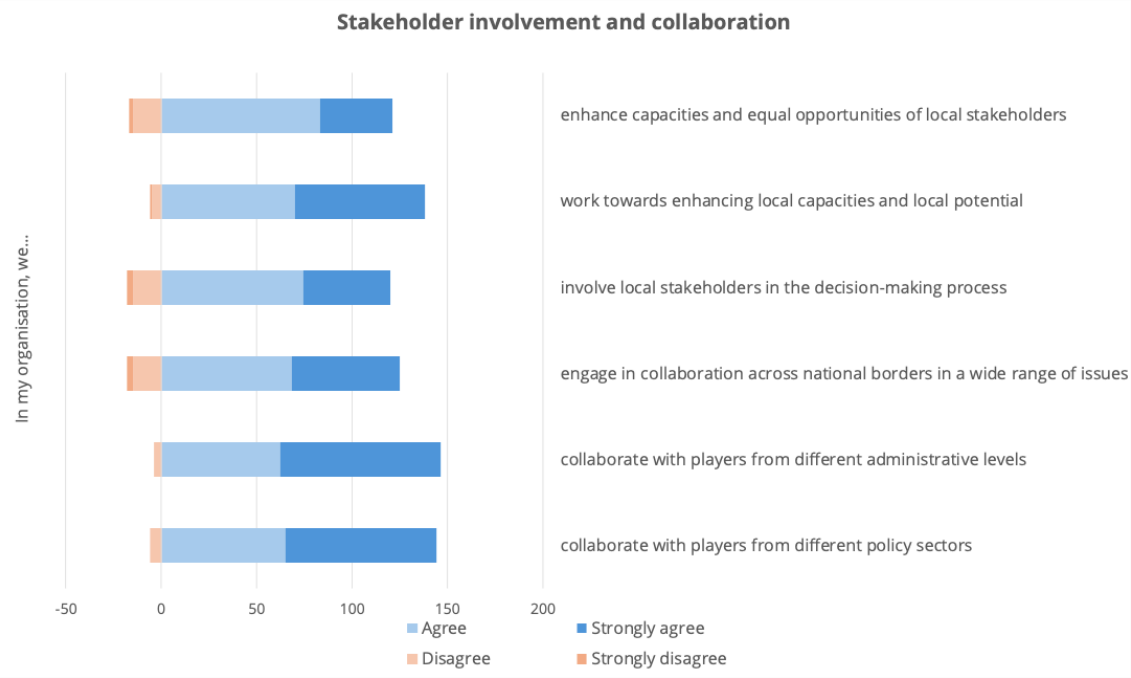
Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

3.3.3 Stakeholder involvement and collaboration

The following section presents survey findings on stakeholder involvement and collaboration and how far they are represented, have changed, or remain the same in respondents' work.

Stakeholder collaboration focuses on collaboration across sectors and administrative levels. Collaboration across sectors, administrative levels and borders as well as capacity building for stakeholders, is a key principle of the functioning and implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. According to the survey responses, it is primarily pursued through collaboration with stakeholders from various sectors and administrative levels. This is followed by efforts to enhance local capacities and local potential. However, enhancing capacities and equal opportunities of local stakeholders, involving local stakeholders in the decision-making process and cross-border cooperation are less prominent (Figure 3.8).

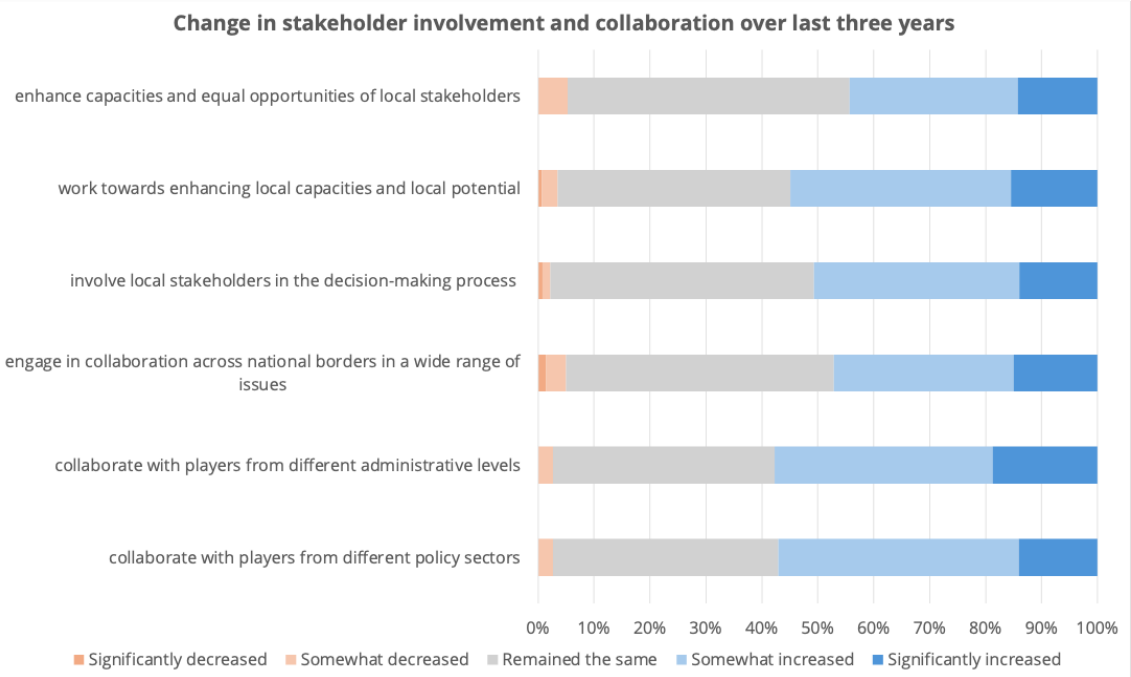
Figure 3.8 Stakeholder involvement and collaboration



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Enhanced collaboration between administrative levels and policy sectors. Looking at the change since adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030, responses indicate that enhancing collaboration between administrative levels and policy sectors is a core focus of their work. This has seen a substantial increase over the last three years. However, a response from Norway highlights concerns that the state's increasing control over public management has weakened local and regional elected governments, leading to a lack of cooperation between different levels of governance (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9 Change in stakeholder involvement and collaboration



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

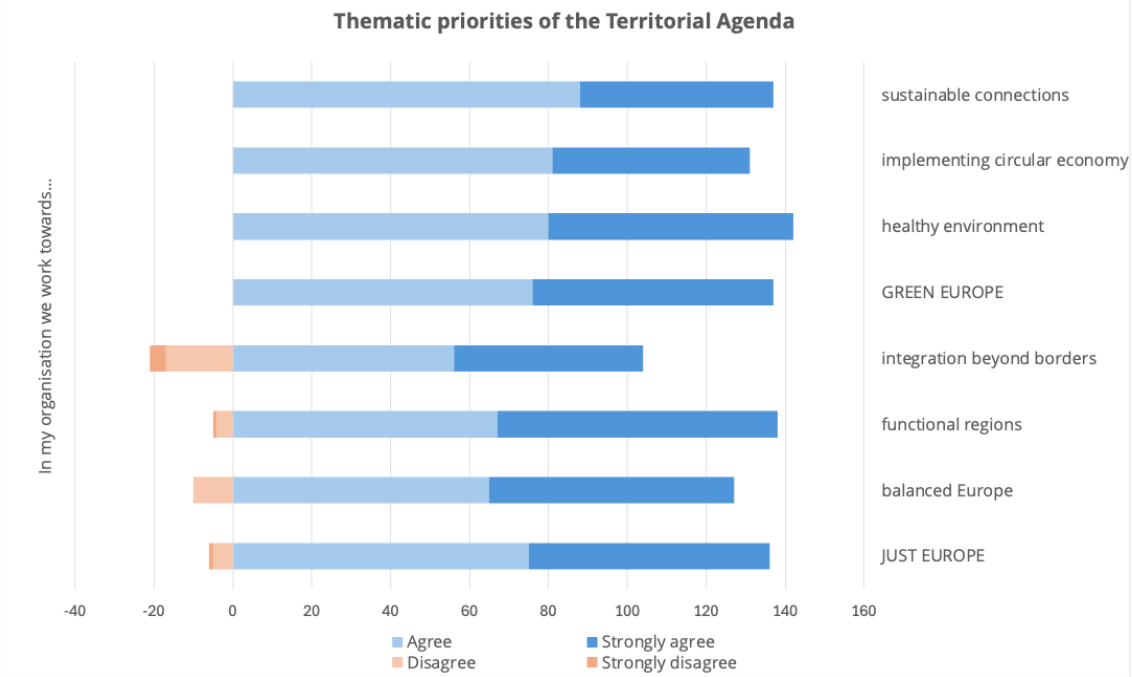
Enhancing capacities and equal opportunities of local stakeholders and engaging across national borders has remained stable. According to the survey, enhanced capacity and equal opportunities for local stakeholders, as well as cooperation across national borders, has remained relatively stable over the last three years, with less change than other elements.

3.3.4 Territorial Agenda 2030 thematic priorities

This section reflects on Territorial Agenda 2030 thematic priorities and whether they are applied in the daily work of respondents and to what degree application changed since adoption of the Territorial Agenda 2030.

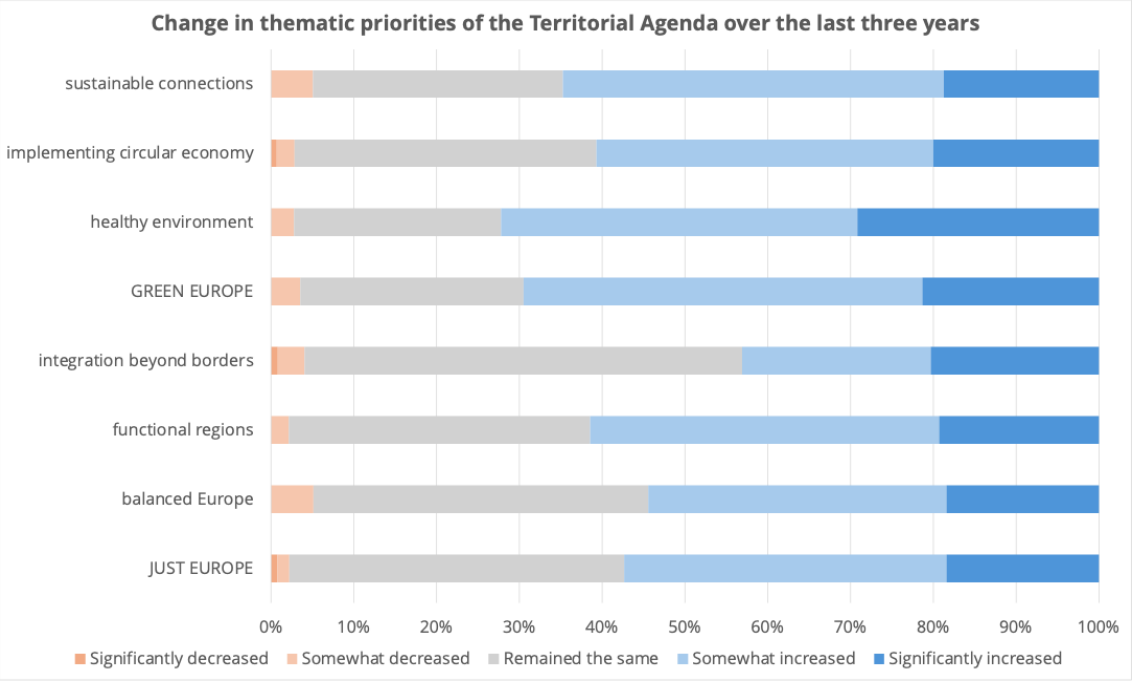
In general, Just and Green Europe stay at a comparable level. The overarching objectives of a Just and Green Europe do not show significant differences in how much they are incorporated in respondents' work (Figure 3.10). This reflects the widespread efforts across Europe to achieve a Just and Green transition. However, there has been a slight change in recent years, with a small decrease (Figure 3.11). Looking at more detailed priorities, healthy environment (under the Green Europe objective) and function integration (under the Just Europe objective) are the most widely applied, closely followed by the others. (Figure 3.10). Notably, healthy environment and sustainable connections have seen a noticeable increase in focus over the last three years (Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.10 Thematic priorities of the Territorial Agenda 2030



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Figure 3.11 Change in thematic priorities of the Territorial Agenda



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

Integration beyond borders loses importance. The thematic priority of integration beyond borders changed least over the last three years and remains the least prominent priority. Although the increase in the functional region focus implies further integration beyond and across borders, the priority has not been taken up much in recent years. However, respondents indicated that more focus should be given to cross-border functional areas such as cross-border metropolitan areas and cross-border commuting zones.

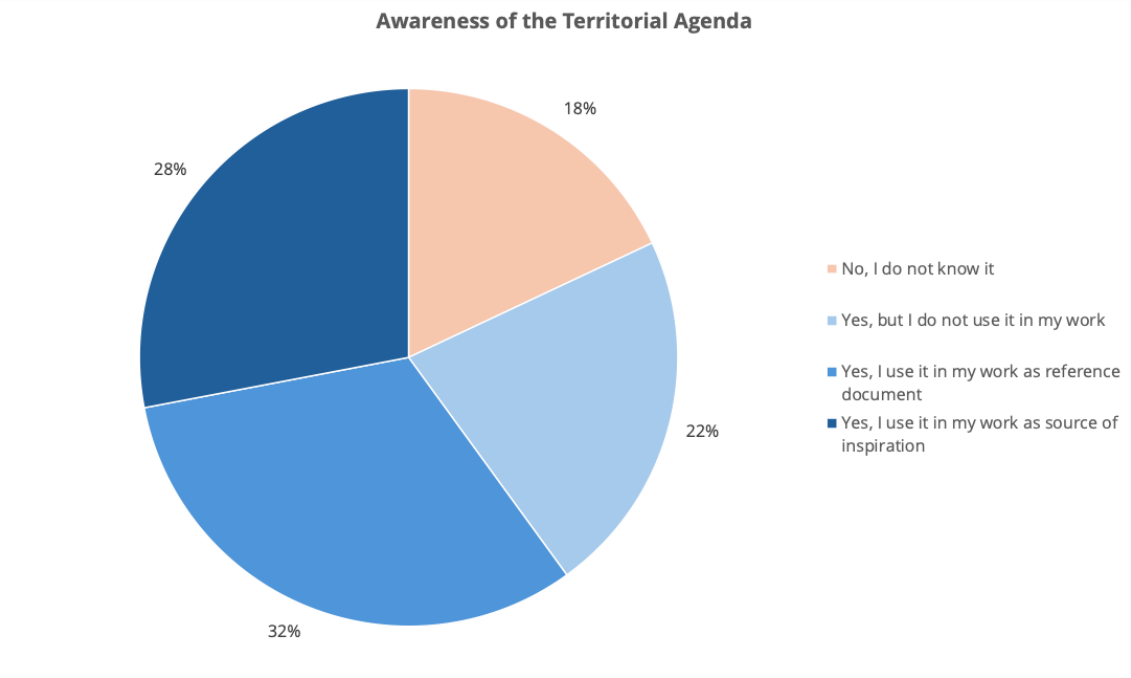
Most respondents use the Territorial Agenda 2030 in their work. 60% of respondents use it either as a reference document or as a source of inspiration. Nevertheless, the Territorial Agenda 2030 is unknown to 18% of the respondents. Interestingly, these 18% apply the principles and priorities laid down in the Territorial Agenda, which means they learnt about them from other sources. Interestingly, specific local and regional characteristics and evolving needs are also identified as the most commonly used place-based approaches and tool among those unfamiliar with the Territorial Agenda. Many respondents including for example Slovenia's Ministry of Natural Resources and Spatial Planning and Spatial Planning Office of the Łódź Voivodeship find the Territorial Agenda 2030 useful for justifying and shaping policy decisions, aligning national and regional strategies with broader European objectives, and providing a comprehensive approach to addressing territorial challenges. Despite its usefulness, some find the Territorial Agenda 2030 to be complex and abstract, requiring adaptation and translation to be more practical for specific contexts.

Challenges in raising awareness and implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030. Survey respondents identified several obstacles to raising awareness about the Territorial Agenda 2030. One of the main challenges is the complexity of the agenda, which makes it difficult for policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public to fully understand. Additionally, it often competes with other policy documents and priorities, which can lead to it being overlooked. Its visibility is low, and it is not well-promoted, especially when compared to other European documents. This issue is further compounded by the agenda's non-binding nature, reducing its perceived significance. Organisational and political factors also present challenges. There is little cooperation between national institutions, differing political priorities, and a lack of multi-level governance, all of which hinder implementation. Legal and administrative obstacles, particularly at the local level, add to the complexity of executing Territorial Agenda 2030 initiatives. These obstacles can create difficulties in the smooth implementation of action-oriented investments in border regions. Addressing and eliminating these

barriers could strengthen cooperation at local and regional levels, as well as enhance integration of the Agenda 2030 framework.

Strengthening application of the Territorial Agenda 2030. Survey responses offer several recommendations to strengthen application of the Territorial Agenda 2030. A primary focus is on enhancing communication and public awareness by linking its objectives to concrete actions and widely disseminating successful examples. There is an emphasis on increasing the visibility of the Territorial Agenda 2030 through targeted communication campaigns and consistent messaging across governance levels. Political and institutional support is identified as crucial, with suggestions to better integrate the Territorial Agenda with European funds and align it with national, regional and local policies. Stronger political backing and closer ties to sectoral policies, particularly in cohesion and regional development, are deemed essential for effective implementation. Encouraging cross-sector collaboration and involving a broader range of stakeholders in decision making are seen as ways to ensure the document's successful implementation. Additionally, involving higher education institutions and professional organisations is recommended, along with developing targeted training programmes for stakeholders. This educational approach should facilitate a deeper understanding and uptake of the Territorial Agenda's principles. Sharing best practices, improving coordination and integrating the Territorial Agenda more effectively into EU funding and policies would support these efforts.

Figure 3.12 Awareness of the Territorial Agenda

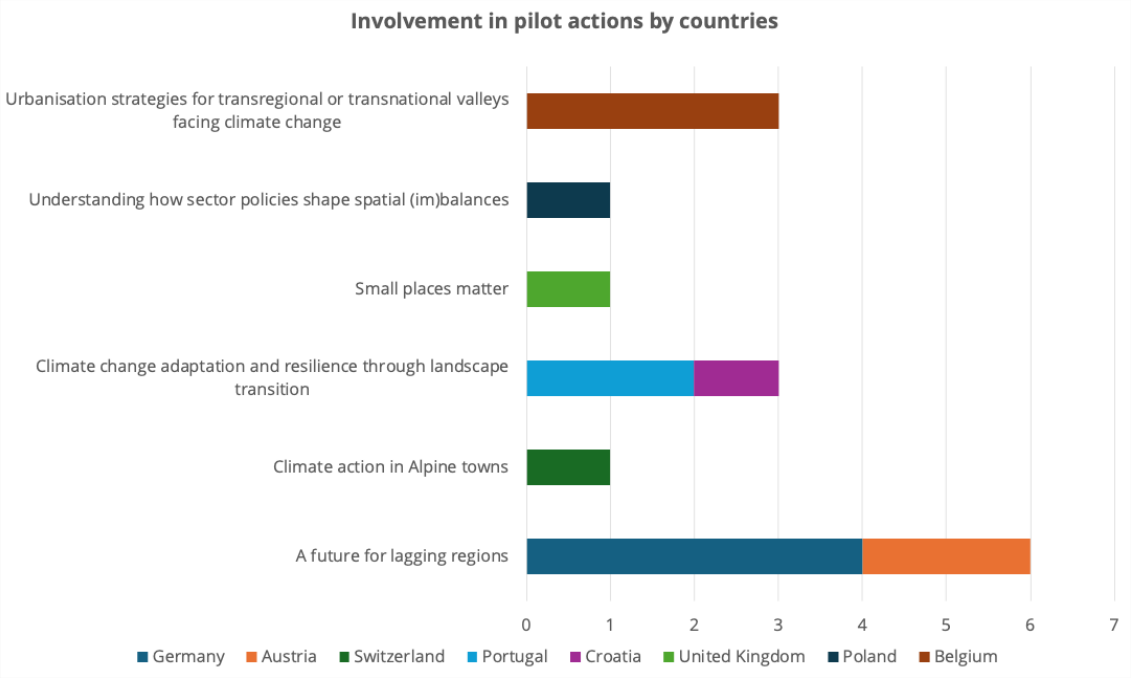


Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=150)

3.4 Survey 'Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions uptake'

The survey on pilot actions uptake was completed by 15 respondents. The survey was structured into four parts: Introduction, Opening Section, Pilot Actions Uptake, and Closing Section, with a total of nine questions. This survey specifically targets participants in Territorial Agenda 2030 pilot actions, aiming to gather detailed insights and reflections from these.

Figure 3.13 Involvement in pilot actions by countries

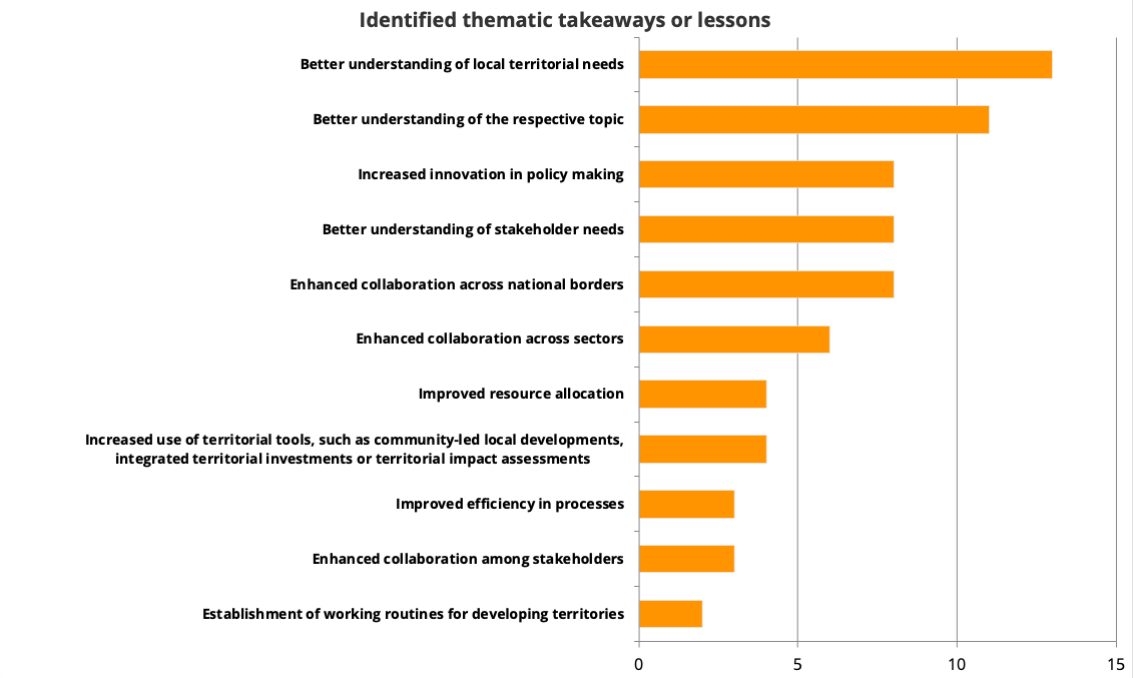


Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=15)

Most responses concern the pilot action 'A future for lagging regions,' followed by 'Urbanisation strategies for transregional and transnational valleys facing climate change' and 'Climate change adaptation and resilience through landscape transition'. The pilot actions 'Small places matter,' 'Climate action in Alpine towns,' and 'Understanding how sector policies shape spatial (im)balances' each received one response. No responses were received for the pilot action 'Cross-Border Spatial Planning'.

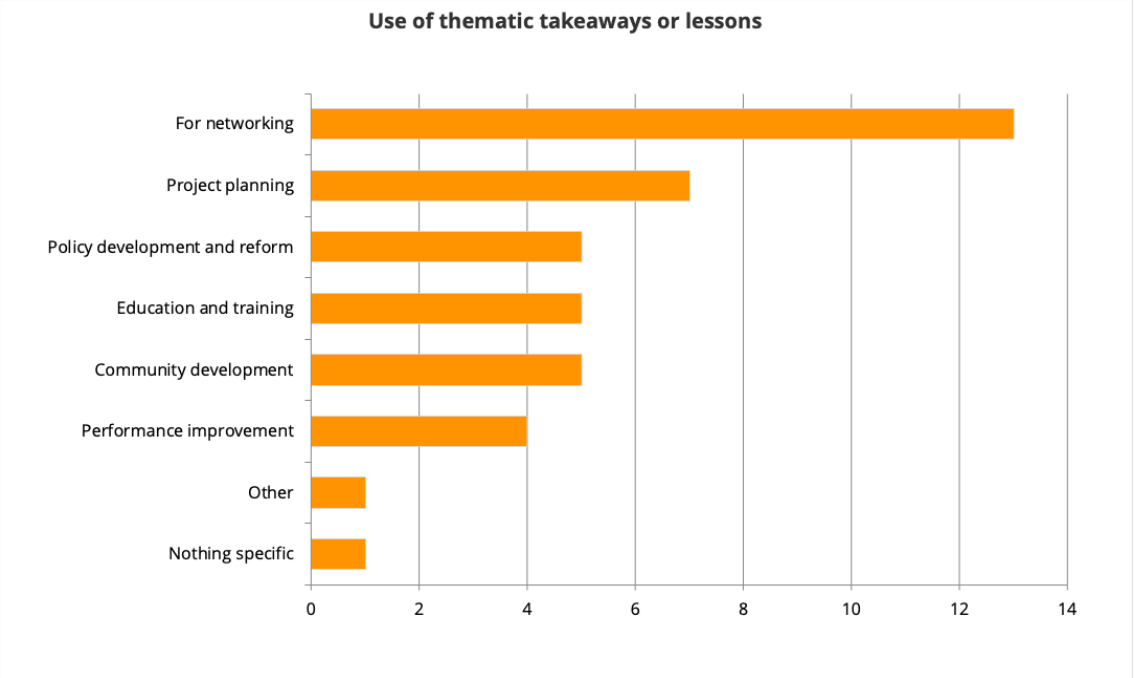
Most of the replies come from Germany, followed by Austria and Portugal (Figure 3.13). Three responses were received from lead stakeholders, i.e. Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE and Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) and Portugal's Directorate-General for Territory. Respondents identified two key thematic takeaways: a better understanding of local territorial needs and the respective topic. Additionally, collaboration across sectors and borders, innovation in policymaking, and understanding stakeholder needs were recognised as significant. However, establishing working routines for developing territories was considered the least important (Figure 3.14). These takeaways and lessons will primarily be used for networking and project planning. Additionally, they will also be applied, though to a lesser extent, in community development, education and training, policy development and reform, and performance improvement. (Figure 3.15).

Figure 3.14 Thematic takeaways or lessons



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=15)

Figure 3.15 Use of thematic takeaways or lessons



Source: Spatial Foresight 2024 (online survey, n=15)

Strategies to enhance the impact of pilot actions. Adequate funding is seen as crucial for all partners to build capacity and sustain implementation of these actions. Furthermore, planning for stakeholder involvement at different levels and stages of project implementation is highlighted as essential. Also, disseminating the results of pilot actions through official channels, such as EU-sponsored publications would ensure these initiatives do not end abruptly. Regular conferences are a way to review and share the outcomes of these actions, creating ongoing engagement and partnerships. Further education on the findings and effects of pilot actions is recommended, along with expanding the topics covered by

these projects. The sustainability of pilot actions is also a focus, with suggestions to improve governance by linking these actions more closely to national programmes and involving government departments at all levels. The need to sustain new networks built during the pilot actions and ensure that communication continues even after the project ends was also stressed.

Thematic recommendations for future pilot actions. Respondents advocate for capacity-building to mobilise and empower local agents. This involves fostering inclusive participatory processes and multi-stakeholder dialogues, while incorporating best practices from international cooperation. Moreover, there is a call to continue efforts in Regulatory Impact Assessments and TIAs, and to integrate innovation and AI in regional development. Additionally, the resilience of border regions is highlighted, with attention on challenges such as skills shortages and cross-border spatial planning. The impact of climate change is another significant theme, especially regarding integrated coastal zone management and resolving conflicts related to spatial impact measurement.

Procedural recommendations for future pilot actions. Survey responses highlighted collaboration and networking as essential components. Engaging with allies who have relevant experience, such as CoR and ESPON, can provide valuable insights before initiating research. Also, clear planning and time management are crucial, with an emphasis on defining project phases, setting realistic expectations for collaborators and allocating more time than anticipated for tasks. Financial considerations play a significant role in the feasibility of cooperation. In addition, the active involvement of regional and local actors is crucial, and ensuring they receive appropriate funding is necessary for the success of pilot actions. Respondents advocate for knowledge exchange through regular meetings, workshops and excursions. Pilot actions could be grouped to enhance interaction and provide a structured timeline.

3.5 Overview of workshops & interviews

Beyond document studies and surveys, the work for this report involved intensive exchanges and discussions with stakeholders. We would like to thank everyone who actively participated and shared ideas and reflections with us.

Interviews

- Andrea Iván (Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, Department for International Territorial Development Co-operations, Hungary)
- Andreas Siantos (Department of Town Planning and Housing, Cyprus)
- Bernhard Schausberger (INTERACT, Austria)
- Jens Kurnol & Sina Redlich (BBSR, Germany)
- Jepp Høst (Agency for Planning and Rural Development, Denmark)
- Kemal Pinarbasi (Helcom, Finland)
- Maria Kostopoulou & Kuriaki Manolopoulou (Ministry of economy, Greece)
- Marine Gaudron (CEMR, Brussels)
- Merja Haapakka (DG REGIO, Brussels)
- Monica Scatasta, Hubert Strauss, Kieran Kearney, Marie Everat, Alexandros Karvounis (EIB, Luxembourg)
- Patrycja Artymowska (Ministry of Development Funds and Regional Policy, Poland)
- Petra Schelkmann (Metropolregion Rhein-Neckar, Germany)
- Silvia Jost & Sebastian Rieben (Federal Office for Spatial Planning / ARE, Switzerland)
- Teofil Gherca (URBACT, France)
- Thiemo Eser & Frederick Richters (Ministry of Housing and Spatial Planning, Luxembourg)
- Željko Šokčević (Permanent Representation of the Republic of Croatia in Brussels)

Workshops & discussion sessions

- 26.04.2024 – NTCCP meeting, Workshop stocktaking review (Namur, Belgium)
- 24.05.2024 – INTERACT, go territorial – TA2030 review (online)

- 06.06.2024 – ESPON Seminar workshop, how is the Territorial Agenda 2030 used? Are we on track for a future for all places? (Mons, Belgium)
- 21.06.2024 - EESC, Study Group on Revision of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (online)
- 25.06.2024 – DGTC meeting, Stocktaking Review of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (Brussels, Belgium)
- 24.09.2024 – NTCCP meeting (Budapest, Hungary)
- 26.09.2024 – Territorial Agenda Pilot Action 'Circular Rural Regions' Kick-off (Berlin, Germany)
- 03.10.2024 – EESC, Challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda 2030 (Naples, Italy)
- 06.11.2024 – ESPON Seminar workshop, Territorial Agenda 2030 review (Budapest, Hungary)
- 26.11.2024 – DGTC meeting (Budapest, Hungary)

Sounding board

A major shortcoming of the Territorial Agenda 2030 is its focus on debate with the usual suspects. This is a rather 'closed club' which calls on others to consider its priorities, but does not systematically engage with them. As the cross-sectoral approach is an essential principle of the Territorial Agenda 2030, we have set up a sounding board with people who are sympathetic to territorial cohesion and the aims of the Territorial Agenda, but who are not directly linked to the governance and application of the Territorial Agenda. They are critical friends and discuss how the Territorial Agenda may improve its outreach beyond the usual suspects. The meetings were:

- 24.05.2024 – First sounding board meeting
- 24.10.2024 – Second sounding board meeting

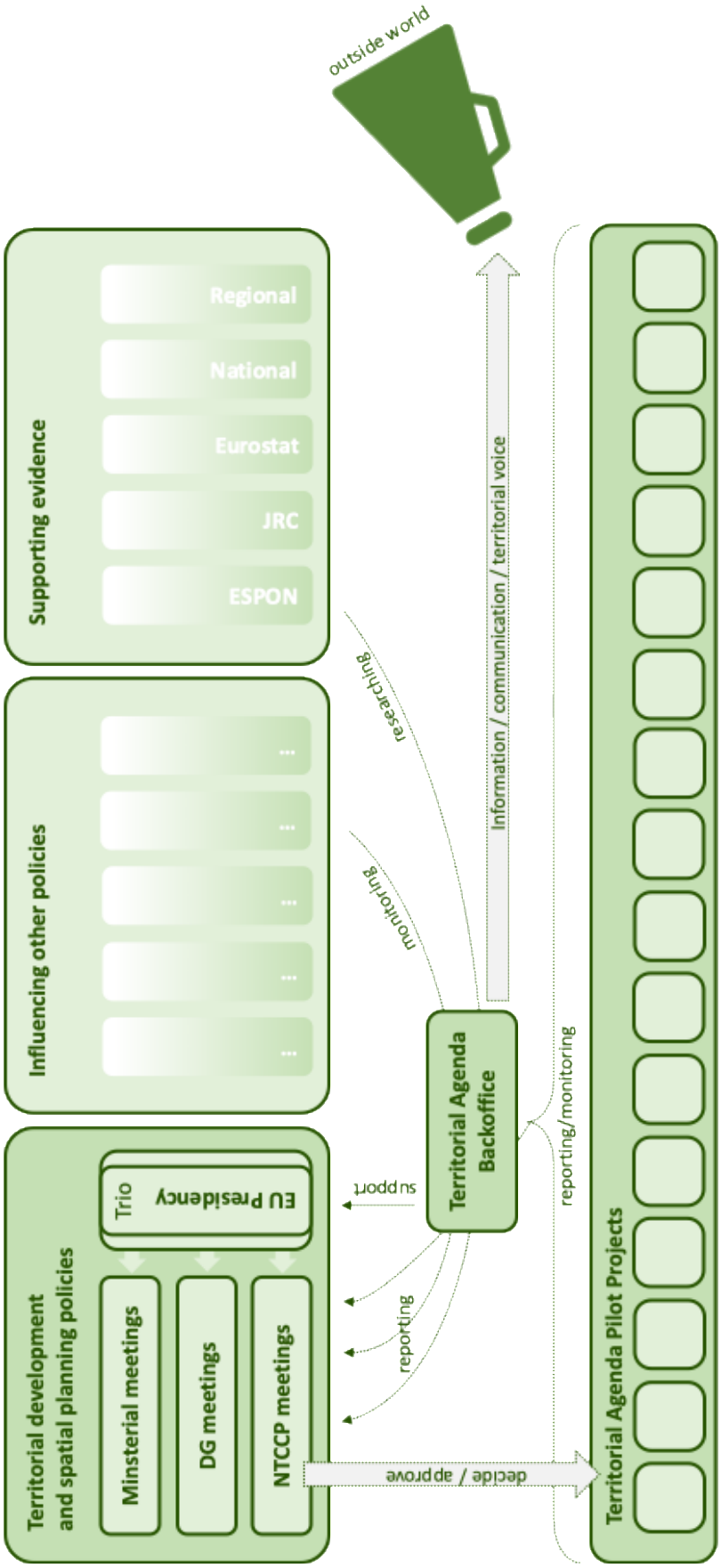
The sounding board members are:

- Andreea Alexandra Scriosteanu (Vice-President at European Youth Forum, Romania)
- Claudia Fassero (Metropolitan City of Turin, Italy)
- Elisa Vilares (Lisbon City Council, Portugal)
- Fiona Wieland–Heutink (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Netherlands)
- Jean Peyrony (MOT, France)
- Jonas Scholze (European Urban Initiative)
- Kemal Pinarbasi (Helcom, Finland)
- Marion Eckardt (CLLD Region Halland, Sweden)
- Nicolas Singer (Interreg Europe)
- Petra Schelkmann (Metropolregion Rhein-Neckar, Germany)
- Talis Linkaitc (Consultant on public policy development, Ex-Minister of Transport, Latvia)
- Theofil Gherca (Urbact)

3.6 Territorial Agenda back-office

Based on the discussions of a possible Territorial Agenda back-office during the elaboration of the Territorial Agenda 2030, the below figure provides some reflections on the tasks of a possible back-office.

Figure 3.16 Possible Territorial Agenda back-office



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