European Commission

HANDBOOK OF

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Joint Research Centre

EUR 29990 EN

HANDBOOK OF

SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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EU Science Hub

https://ec.europa.eu/jrc

JRC118841

EUR 29990 EN

PDF ISBN 978-92-76-13673-6 ISSN 1831-9424 doi:10.2760/32842

Print ISBN 978-92-76-16425-8 ISSN 1018-5593 doi:10.2760/020656

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020
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How to cite this report: Fioretti, C., Pertoldi, M., Busti, M. and Van Heerden, S. (eds), *Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies*, EUR 29990 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-13673-6, doi:10.2760/32842, JRC118841.

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TERRITORIAL FOCUS

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Today, urban areas across the European Union (EU) face a wide range of different challenges, including affordable housing, migrants' inclusion, social segregation, environmental footprint, traffic congestion, climate change, ageing, urban health. At the same time, they present opportunities for development, including diversity, creativity and innovation (Vandecasteele et al., 2019). What seems particularly relevant for integrated and place-based approaches is not only that these challenges and opportunities occur in urban contexts but also that each one has a specific spatial dimension.

Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategies supported by EU cohesion policy are designed to target specific areas, with a distinct territorial focus. **Having an explicit territorial focus means that needs, challenges and opportunities for development must match the appropriate spatial scale and territorial context.** Choosing the appropriate area to implement the strategy is not only a methodological decision, but also a policy decision, which can depend on policy agendas and available governance tools. Moreover, the appropriate spatial dimension also has strategic value and can be a means of adopting an integrated approach to policy-making.

To better understand the spatial dimension of SUD strategies across the EU, it is first important to clarify what kind of urban areas are targeted. Both current and future regulatory frameworks are open to supporting **urban areas of any kind, acknowledging the importance of cities of various sizes and of different types of agglomerations encompassing multiple municipalities.** This is in line with the growing mismatch between administrative boundaries, urban structures and citizens' behaviour. Putting it differently, in the EU there is a clear spatial mismatch between where people live and where job opportunities and services are located, leading people to carry on their daily activities across the administrative boundaries of different municipalities. Due to this increased interdependency, functional urban areas have become an ever more important category for policy-makers.

Looking at the Guidance for Member States (European Commission, 2015a) related to European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) 2014-2020,

and at the way strategies are currently implemented on the ground, it is possible to see that **SUD strategies can have a narrower or wider spatial focus. More specifically, it is possible to** group the various approaches into three focus areas:

- **area within city/town (districts/neighbourhoods)**, that is to say one or more specific districts or localities within an administrative area;
- **cities, towns or suburbs**, that is to say an individual municipality with no restrictions regarding its population size or density;
- **functional area** or **multiple municipalities**, that is to say two or more municipalities that are combined for the sake of the strategy. This category encompasses functional urban areas, metropolitan areas, twin cities and city networks.

Learning from data

Analysis of the strategies implemented during the 2014-2020 programming period shows that the majority of SUD strategies focus on cities, towns or suburbs (45%), followed by districts/neighbourhoods (31%), functional areas (20%), a network of cities (4%), and a portion of territory with specific features such as a park, an archaeological zone, or an island (0.4%).

All the aforementioned focus areas pose special challenges to policymakers in the design and implementation process, some of which are particularly difficult and recurrent. In particular, this building block will focus on the following challenges:

- **targeting neighbourhoods**
- **the functional area approach**
- **urban-rural linkages.**

The first methodological challenge concerns **neighbourhoods.** In particular, deprived neighbourhoods where multiple problems overlap have been one of the key focuses of the URBAN Community Initiative (1994-1999; 2000-2006). URBAN promoted area-based initiatives are seen as a good vehicle for applying the integrated approach, spatially concentrating hard and soft polices in small urban areas.

At the same time, the long experience with neighbourhood initiatives has highlighted several shortcomings related to the area-based approach (Tosics, 2015; Colini et al., 2013). In this respect, **it is recommended to adopt an outward-looking perspective on neighbourhood strategies**, taking account of the interdependent relations between different urban areas and spatial or administrative scales, aiming at the integration of the targeted area within the larger context.

A second challenge concerns the **functional area approach**, **which is suited to addressing the interdependent relationships and challenges of multiple municipalities** (e.g. functional urban areas,

metropolitan areas but also river basins, coastal areas, mountain ranges, etc.). These territories are often spatially and economically interlinked, but politically fragmented. The challenge consists in **overcoming fragmentation and inefficient actions caused by administrative boundaries, and ensuring more coordinated action between territories**, that is to say ensuring territorial integration.

This concept is also relevant to a third methodological challenge. '**Urban-rural linkages**' indicate the complex set of bi-directional links (e.g. labour market flows, public service provision, mobility, environmental and cultural services, leisure assets, etc.) **that connect places, thus blurring the distinction between urban and rural, especially for small- and medium-sized cities and towns**.

When working with complex geographical areas (functional areas, urban-rural regions, even networks of cities) the main question seems to be that of promoting better cooperation among municipalities to exploit synergies, providing links as levers for development. This is particularly relevant when different territories (either belonging to different administrations or with different characteristics, even if they are spatially far away from each other) face the same development challenges (European Commission, 2015b).

TARGETING NEIGHBOURHOODS

In this section we address:
When to adopt an area based approach?
How to achieve spatial concentration while consider that issues and opportunities are not confined by neighbourhood boundaries?

One of the major challenges facing EU cities is their internal imbalance. Even urban areas that are performing well are not exempt from **growing socio-economic polarisation,** which often corresponds to spatial segregation of the most vulnerable population (Vandecasteele et al., 2019), with multiple problems becoming concentrated in certain neighbourhoods.

In order to respond to this issue, cities and urban areas develop strategies of neighbourhood regeneration, applying an **area-based approach**. The area-based approach refers to **strategies that define a limited area of action, where investments are concentrated and different measures are integrated**, to simultaneously tackle the various dimensions of complex urban problems (see also Cross-Sectoral Integration chapter).

When to adopt an area-based approach?

This approach, with a specific reference to the concentration of cross-sectoral actions and funding in selected target areas, was part of the URBAN Community Initiative method, and later became what has been defined as a common European 'Aquis Urbain' (European Commission, 2009). This approach became mainstream in the 2007-2013 period, and neighbourhood regeneration remained prominent in the current (2014-2020) programming period and is maintained for the upcoming one (2021-2027).

Ex-post evaluation of the URBAN II initiative (EC, Ecotec, 2010) found that the focus on small areas, namely neighbourhoods in crisis, has been proven **particularly successful when addressing specific local challenges, especially through initiatives with direct impact on local communities** (e.g. improving educational attainment, providing access to quality public services).

The area-based approach in neighbourhood regeneration allows authorities to:

- **engage local partners** (the local community, and the voluntary and private sectors) and empower them to contribute and bring value to the collective development of programs (bottom-up approach);
- more easily **organise integration** among projects and sectors[7];
- **create a critical mass** and momentum, to hold stakeholders' attention and ensure a lasting legacy.

Learning from data

Because of these advantages, the focus on a limited area of action has also been popular among strategies funded during the 2014-2020 programming period. In particular, 31% of them have focused on neighbourhoods. The share is even higher **for the countries that took part in the URBAN programme I and/or II, standing at 38%**, while the percentage is 6% in countries that did not take part in the Initiative (EU-13 Member States, which joined the EU in 2004 or later). This suggests that in some EU-15 countries, the URBAN method has become mainstream as a method for sustainable urban development[8].

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[7] According to Tosics: 'Lessons from the Urban II (2000–6) programme showed that it is much easier to organise integration on a small scale, in neighbourhoods, with interventions around the magnitude of €10 million' (Tosics, 2017).

[8] The 'EU15' refers to countries which were members of the European Union prior to the accession of ten candidate countries on 1 May 2004. The EU15 comprised the following 15 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The 'EU13' refers to the member countries which joined the EU in 2004 or later: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The majority of strategies that target neighbourhoods have a small budget (**76% have a budget of less than € 10 million**) and focus on **thematic objectives (TO) 9 and social inclusion (82% of the strategies)**. In other words, neighbourhood strategies are largely used to provide support for physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived communities.

In some cases, community-led local development (CLLD) has been used to foster social cohesion, enhance citizen participation, or promote capacity-building and engagement of the local community (see Governance chapter). In fact, CLLD can be particularly suitable for small areas within larger cities such as deprived neighbourhoods but also town centres, areas with particular types of housing, areas undergoing industrial change, areas facing particular environmental problems, peri-urban areas and so on (Soto et al., 2012).

How to achieve spatial concentration while consider that issues and opportunities are not confined by neighbourhood boundaries?

Be careful!

The long experience of neighbourhood initiatives has also highlighted **several shortcomings** of the area-based approach. In particular, one of the major problems concerns **strategies that maintain an inward-looking perspective and require that all the interventions be limited to the target area**. In those cases, strategies are unable to benefit from interventions on a wider scale when needed. Moreover, there is a **risk that problems are not solved, but are simply displaced to other areas**: as a consequence of investments in the action-area prices go up, leading to gentrification, pushing out the poorest inhabitants to other deprived areas of the city. In many cases, improving the situation of deprived areas would require coordinated interventions outside the borders of the area, for example, transport investments to improve accessibility, or economic measures to tackle unemployment (European Commission, Ecotec, 2010).

Additional resource

URBACT NODUS - BRIDGING URBAN RENEWAL AND SPATIAL PLANNING (2010)

The **URBACT NODUS project** advocates for placing area-based interventions in a wider strategic context:

'According to the initial hypothesis of NODUS, to overcome the "area effect" it is necessary to extend the integrated approach to

the city-region (or regional) level, where the areas for interventions should be selected, NGOs and population groups should be involved in the area programmes and the outcomes should be monitored. This means the second, "external integration": local area based actions must be integral parts of larger-scale, broader territory development strategies' (URBACT, 2010, p.30).

The NODUS working group involved three regions: Catalonia in Spain, Emilia Romagna in Italy, and Mazovia in Poland, and four cities: Dobrich in Bulgaria, Alba Iulia in Romania, Katowice in Poland, and Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Among the results of NODUS is a methodology that uses multi-party cooperation to develop integrated urban renewal strategies across different spatial and administrative levels, in order to overcome the shortcomings of area-based interventions. The methodology comprises four steps:

Step 1: A model of multi-party governance to organise renewal and spatial planning policies on a metropolitan or city-region level.

Step 2: Methods for mapping deprived neighbourhoods on the basis of the chosen concept of deprivation and the respective, reliable and precise data, with the goal of creating bridges between deprived neighbourhoods and dynamic zones.

Step 3: Possible actions for successful renovation and social inclusion projects, particularly in terms of integrated urban renewal.

Step 4: Evaluation of the results on a regional level in order to multiply the positive effects and reach a territorial balance.

For more information

URBACT (2010) NODUS Linking Urban Renewal and Regional Spatial Planning: https://urbact.eu/nodus

In order to overcome the limitations of an area-based approach **it is recommended to adopt an outward-looking perspective**. That means taking account of the **interdependence between different urban areas and across spatial or administrative scales, with the aim of integrating the targeted area into the larger context** (city or functional area or region). In administrative terms, this requires more flexibility, allowing some funds to be used outside the action area boundary, while keeping the strategy focused on the appointed neighbourhood(s).

This suggestion was confirmed during evaluation of the URBAN II programme (2000-2006) when it was noticed that the matching of local

actions in the programme areas with wider city and regional plans enhanced the effectiveness and impact of URBAN II resources and resulted in an integrated approach to urban development (EC, Ecotec, 2010).

To overcome the aforementioned risks, neighbourhoods must not be seen as separate islands with fixed boundaries. On the contrary, it is possible to talk about 'interlinked hubs of activity whose precise boundaries overlap and evolve over time, and where the appropriate scale of intervention depends upon the problem to be solved' (Soto et al., 2012, p. 4).

Many of the SUD strategies implemented during the 2014-2020 period adopted a similar approach, and some conclusions can already be drawn.

First of all, neighbourhood regeneration requires a **national/regional policy on deprived areas** to set the goals and define the indicators for selecting and monitoring intervention areas, as for example in France (see Funding and Finance chapter) and Germany. In this regard, the outward-looking approach has requirements regarding data gathering and analysis. In the selection phase, diagnosis and monitoring of the target areas is extremely important to have **access to indicators with a high level of spatial granularity**. Moreover, it is important to **compare them to the city average**, or, depending on the issues at stake, rank them within wider contexts. Even if the focus is on the target area, **territorial analysis and SWOT analysis** should be used to link problems and opportunities with neighbouring areas.

Another important step in the outward-looking approach is **placing the regeneration of neighbourhoods within a wider strategic framework**. This can be done in different ways. One of the simplest is to align the neighbourhood strategy with existing city-wide strategic frameworks. This is most successful when the neighbourhood strategy actively participates in pursuing the objectives set in the city vision. This is true, for example, of ITI Opportunities for Rotterdam (NL) 2014-2020, which applies a **'district-driven approach' to city development** (see Strategic dimension chapter), and that of Berlin (DE), where the Future Initiative City District contributes to the Berlin 2030 strategy.

Learning from practice

THE FUTURE INITIATIVE CITY DISTRICTS II – ZIS II, BERLIN (DE)

Berlin has a long tradition of working through area-based programmes for neighbourhood regeneration. Both editions of the URBAN Community Initiative took place in Berlin. Moreover, since the end of the 1990s, national programmes like Social City

(Soziale Stadt) have been used to promote micro-interventions in deprived areas, and to encourage community participation and capacity-building.

Building on this tradition, during the programming periods 2000-2005/2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF) has been used to co-finance 'Urban and local infrastructures - areas with special development needs' and 'Future Initiative City District' (ZIS and ZIS II).

Currently, ZIS II constitutes an umbrella framework at city level which allows the bundling of resources to promote the physical and socio-economic regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods and the redevelopment of 'opportunity' areas. The initiative integrates EU Sustainable Urban Development with domestic programmes such as Soziale Stadt, Stadtumbau, Bildung im Quartier, Stadtteilzentren and Bibliotheken im Stadtteil.

Actions supported by the initiative focus on education, community participation, improvement of public spaces, social cohesion, integration of migrants, redevelopment of abandoned spaces, and improvement of public infrastructure.

The Initiative allows for an outward-looking approach to neighbourhood regeneration. It provides for general objectives that the individual projects should aim at, and aligns them with the wider framework of the Berlin 2030 strategy.

To ensure that funded projects are effective, ZIS II identifies five large 'action-areas' for intervention, characterised by multiple aspects of deprivation. At a smaller scale, 35 neighbourhoods and 13 city conversion areas are the effective target areas. They are generally located inside one of the five larger action areas. However, many that fall outside those boundaries but are affected by similar problems are still eligible as target areas.

The initiative is based on three types of strategic concept: (i) integrated urban development concepts (integrierte Stadtentwicklungskonzepte, INSEK), (ii) integrated action concepts (integrierte Handlungskonzepte, IHEK), and (iii) integrated urban design concepts (integrierte städtebauliche Entwicklungskonzepte, ISEK). Taken together, these strategic concepts set out detailed planning guidance that links the performance of small-scale interventions in targeted areas to outline indicators of the Future Initiative City District.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=DE-082&fullscreen=yes
Official website of Berlin: http://stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/staedtebau/foerderprogramme/zis/index.shtml

Learning from data

Finally, there are several cases where - although the territorial focus is on the entire city, a functional urban area, or an agglomeration of municipalities - **actions are centred, to a certain degree, on selected neighbourhoods or districts,** for example **disadvantaged neighbourhoods**. In these cases, we can consider the territorial scope of the strategy as **multi-faceted** (Van der Zwet et al., 2017).

This is confirmed by the results of the analysis, according to which **43% of strategies address the issue of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and half of them focus on neighbourhoods**, while the other half focuses on cities or functional urban areas[9]. This means that the issue of deprived neighbourhoods is still central to EU-funded SUD. Moreover, it suggests that a considerable number of strategies are able to place actions on disadvantaged neighbourhoods within a wider strategic framework.

Examples of this approach can be found in Hungary and in Bulgaria, and also in France. In this last case, **strategies address conurbations formed by several municipalities, but focus their interventions on defined priority areas**, that is to say deprived neighbourhoods selected at national level according to indicators of disadvantage, established within the domestic City Policy (Politique de la Ville).

The French case combines various scales: the agglomeration of municipalities, which is the most relevant level to elaborating a large strategic vision and pulling together resources from different sources; the municipality scale; and the neighbourhood/district scale, which is most relevant to setting specific objectives, involving the local community and implementing actions.

In such strategies, it is essential to **manage a multi-scalar governance system,** by establishing wide partnerships involving representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors at different levels (see Governance chapter).

Involving actors at different levels within a partnership can be challenging but also rewarding. On the one hand, local/community partners feel more affected by the interventions, and can easily develop a sense of ownership

[9] The analysis of thematic contents was done on a sample of 344 strategies.

in respect to the project. On the other, actors at city or regional level can help to embed the programmes into a wider policy framework, to deliver effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and to provide support with strategy development and long-term planning.

Learning from practice

INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENT FOR THE TOULON METROPOLIS, TOULON (FR)

Toulon Provence Méditerranée (TPM) is an intercommunal structure created in 2001 (but then reformed recently as a metropolitan area) consisting of 12 municipalities, the main one being Toulon, located along the Mediterranean coast, in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. Toulon Provence Méditerranée has developed an integrated territorial investment (ITI) strategy as a tool for neighbourhood regeneration working jointly with a domestic policy, the TPM City Contract 2015-2020, within the broader framework of a Metropolitan strategy. The TPM 2015-2020 City Contract, signed in July 2015, is funded by the national City Policy (Politique de la Ville) and identifies 13 priority areas distributed over four cities of the larger urban area. An integrated metropolitan project depicts the expected change for the metropolis and provides the umbrella strategy for individual projects. To be eligible for ITI, the projects must fall within the boundary of the priority areas and must be connected to the broader issues affecting the whole territory. The ITI allows for work at the scale of neighbourhoods, while fitting the area-based project in the newly reformed metropolitan area.

The policy process is not exempt from challenges, especially concerning the management of the multi-level governance system which brings together actors at different scales with differing priorities and with different competences. In particular, the nexus between the metropolitan region and the individual priority areas is seen as a challenge for strategy implementation.

In that respect, technical assistance and capacity-building play a major role. In particular, it is worth mentioning the support given by the agency for urbanism 'AUDAT.VAR' (Agence d'urbanisme de l'aire toulonnaise et du Var) that provides territorial analysis at various scales within the regional level. AUDAT.VAR manages an observatory of the priority neighbourhoods and produces monitoring indicators ranked against the cities, the metropolitan region and the average of the 13 priority neighbourhoods. The work of the observatory has allowed evidence-based diagnosis of the local needs, which was used as a basis for the strategy.

Moreover, a key role is that of the TPM metropolis, which acts as Intermediate Body (IB), and has established a specific department called 'European programmes and territorial development' for this purpose. The department manages the relationship between the neighbourhoods, the cities and the metropolitan area; it enables coordination among the projects; it provides for guidance and technical assistance with project development. The department's offices are shared with those of the Regional Council. This allows sectoral and area-based policies to integrate regarding issues of employment, training and economic development, contributing to an outward-looking perspective to neighbourhood regeneration.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=FR-017&amp%3Bfullscreen=yes

Service Europe-ITI TPM: https://metropoletpm.fr/tpm/article/service-europe-iti-tpm

Strategy fiche by Réseau Europe urbain: https://www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr/fr/ressources/recueil-des-strategies-urbaines-integrees

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use the area-based approach when the strategy aims to address specific local challenges which directly affect local communities.
  - From a thematic viewpoint, it is suitable e.g. for reversing socio-spatial segregation, providing accessibility to quality public services, enhancing the quality of public spaces, enhancing education attainment, tackling unemployment, triggering social inclusion, and enhancing economic vitality.
  - From a methodological viewpoint, it facilitates engaging with and empowering local actors (e.g. citizens and local associations) and easier organisation of cross-sectoral Integration, creates a critical mass and momentum to hold stakeholders attention and ensure a lasting legacy.
- Identify the target area(s) based on territorial indicators at the level of neighbourhoods.
  - Composite socio-economic indicators can be employed for this purpose, comprising data on level of education, unemployment, housing conditions
  - Fine-grained data is also useful in the monitoring and evaluation phases.
  - Quantitative data should be augmented with qualitative information in order to gather local knowledge and inhabitants' expertise.

- Data at the neighbourhood level should be ranked against/compared to other areas and wider contexts (city or region).

- Use CLLD for small areas within larger cities, such as deprived neighbourhoods.
  - CLLD can be used to foster social cohesion, enhance citizen participation, or promote capacity-building.
- Adopt an outward-looking perspective to neighbourhood strategies.
  - Strategic links between areas should be established, connecting deprived areas to areas of opportunity, allowing interventions outside the borders of the target area.
  - Area-based programmes should be positioned within wider strategic frameworks, such as overarching city vision and wider territorial policies. Area-based strategies should be thought of as contributing to wider objectives of city/regional development.
- Apply multi-faceted territorial focuses.
  - The appropriate scale for intervention should be chosen according to the scope and nature of the need that is being tackled.
  - Multiple scales should be considered within the same project, with intervention at one level reinforcing interventions at other levels.
- Establish a multilevel governance system.
  - Stakeholders at local level should be involved so that they feel more affected by interventions, and can develop a sense of ownership in respect to the project, ensuring long-lasting effects.
  - Different responsibilities for developing/managing public services should be taken into account
  - Actors at regional level can help embed the programmes in a wider policy framework, deliver effective monitoring and evaluation systems, and provide support with strategy development and long-term planning.
  - Joint administrative boards or intermediate management bodies can help with coordination among levels.

THE FUNCTIONAL AREA APPROACH

In this section we address:
When to adopt the functional area approach?
How to delineate the functional urban area for an SUD strategy?
How to achieve cooperation among actors (municipalities) when there is not a pre-existing framework?

The importance of functional urban areas in the EU can be illustrated by the size of the 'spatial mismatch' between where people live and where job opportunities and services are located: a substantially larger

number of people live outside the core city and cross the administrative boundaries of different municipalities to conduct daily activities (European Commission and UN-HABITAT, 2016). A recent publication by EUROSTAT (2018)[10] reports on the populations of the EU28's largest urban areas, comparing the size of the functional urban area and that of the city. It shows that in some urban areas like Katowice (PL), Lisbon (PT), Manchester (UK) and Paris (FR), the functional urban area had at least five times as many inhabitants as the city centre, as defined by administrative boundaries.

A recent study done on the occasion of the 17th Session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning (CEMAT) (Gea Strategy & Consulting, 2017) **defines functional urban areas as geographic entities formed by one or more urban centres and adjacent territories of influence, forming a unitary system based on socio-economic flows or opportunities (e.g. provision of services)**.

With respect to EU urban policies, the functional area approach is relatively new. **It was a very important policy innovation when the 2014-2020 framework put a special emphasis on it in the context of sustainable urban development.**

When to adopt the functional area approach?

The functional area approach to sustainable urban development is innovative, because it **introduces development policies based on the real needs and opportunities of territories rather than on administrative borders**. To summarise, the main **benefits** of such approach are that:

- it allows projects to capitalise on local potential;
- it encourages territorial democracy;
- it creates a flexible framework for development and planning that transcends administrative boundaries, focusing on the territorial impact of interventions (Gea Strategy & Consulting, 2017).

Be careful!

At the same time it may entail some **risks**, especially related to the lack of organisation. In particular, urban development strategies in functional urban areas risks failing because of:

- fragmentation, disparities, and internal competition;
- lack of coordination, capacity and communication;

[10] See Table 3.2 Summary table for 20 largest cities/urban areas in the EU, 2014.

- lack of leadership;
- lack of support from higher tiers of government (Moonen, 2019).

Learning from data

In the current programming period (2014-2020), a significant number of SUD strategies focus on **functional areas**[11] **(20%),** channelling a significant investment of ESIF[12]. Some strategies also focus on networks of cities (4%), or on territories with specific features (e.g. a mountainous area, an archaeological zone, or an island) (0.4%). These categories can also arguably be defined as focusing on a functional area, whereby the functional use of the territory is the main point of departure for delineating the territorial focus.

Put differently, **the functional area approach** should not be limited to functional urban areas. Rather, it **can be used to identify a space – usually different from administrative boundaries – in which a specific interdependence (or function) occurs, and which may need to be governed jointly**. The interdependence can encompass different dimensions: **political, social, economic, cultural, territorial and geographical.** Moreover, in many cases, functional areas are complex systems, characterised by a superposition of different functional relations.

Learning from data

Data from analyses of strategy themes show that strategies focusing on functional areas address more TO4 (low-carbon economy) and TO6 (environment protection and resource efficiency). Moreover, a focus on TO7 (transport) is almost exclusively addressed in functional areas (as opposed to other territorial focuses). These thematic priorities are confirmed when looking at key words characterising strategies. In particular, the first two key words for functional areas are 'mobility' (76%) and 'energy' (52%). Interestingly, even if 'spatial planning' is not often selected, there are other key words concerning spatial issues that are often recurrent, as for example public spaces (43%) and abandoned spaces (39%). At the same time it is surprising that two important key words characterising the new urban question as it emerges in the Urban Agenda for the EU, that is to say 'climate adaptation' and 'migration', are hardly ever found in functional areas strategies (in 11% and 0% of cases, respectively).

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[11] In the context of Strat-board, functional areas include various types of urban agglomerations: multiple cities/towns, metropolitan areas and Functional Urban Areas (FUA) as statistically defined.

[12] Overall, the largest share of ESIF funding is invested in functional areas, which absorb 51.1% of total funding (corresponding to € 8.3 billion). Cities are the second category, absorbing 35.2% of ESIF investment (€ 5.6 billion), while neighbourhoods receive 13.3% of it (€ 2.1 billion).

These findings are aligned with the OECD publication on metropolitan governance that shows that transport and spatial planning are the main fields of work of metropolitan governance bodies (OECD, 2015).

In a framework of integrated policies, **the added value of the functional area approach is seen especially in the fields of spatial planning, economic development and improving accessibility/ mobility**. The functional area approach is particularly suited to solving certain problems, such as:

- **limiting urban sprawl** by adopting shared and coordinated spatial development plans;
- **improving the focus of some categories of investments** such as **business infrastructure**, quality and availability of **public services, mobility, administrative capacity;**
- providing better, **more efficient and integrated services**, e.g. joint management of schools, integration of public transport (Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, Romanian Presidency if the Council of the European Union, 2019).

At the same time, **it has potential to tackle emerging issues** (such as migration, or climate change), which require more innovative solutions but struggle to enter the mainstream of policy-making.

How to delineate the functional urban area for an SUD strategy?

Functional urban areas do not pre-exist, in the sense that in the majority of cases they are not defined by administrative boundaries. Rather, they emerge from socio-economic and spatial relations. For this reason the first challenge is to delineate them. The complexity of the concept implies that there is no single methodology.

To establish a common framework in Europe, EUROSTAT launched a legislative initiative called 'Tercet' aimed at integrating the classification of territorial units based on population thresholds known as NUTS with a classification based on territorial typologies. Among them, **the typology of Functional Urban Area (FUA)** was introduced at a local level.

Here, the delineation methodology for FUA is based on the new harmonised definition of 'urban' developed jointly by the EU and OECD (OECD, 2012). **Functional Urban Areas (FUAs) are defined as densely populated urban centres (cities) and adjacent municipalities with high**

levels of commuting to densely populated urban centres (commuting zones)[13].

Learning from data

Analysis of SUD strategies during 2014-2020 shows that the boundary of the functional urban areas seldom corresponds to that of the statistical FUAs as defined by OECD/EC methodology. When superposing the two types of areas, it emerges that there is a significant overlap between the two (meaning that more of the 66% of the strategic functional area overlap with the statistical FUA) in only half the cases, and the boundary almost never coincides perfectly.

This is because the establishment of **the boundary of functional urban areas for SUD should be based on various criteria at the same time: on quantitative evidence, on territorial analysis and the objectives of the strategy**. In other words, it requires sound evaluation of the exact territory in which development should take place along with understanding of interdependent relationships, socio-economic complexity, and context, leading to a well-coordinated, coherent mobilisation of urban actors.

Additional resource

ESPON, SPIMA – SPATIAL DYNAMICS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING IN METROPOLITAN AREAS (2018)

The SPIMA project addresses the main challenges of metropolitan development in contemporary Europe. The study builds upon ten targeted areas of analysis (Vienna, Prague, Brno, Zurich, Brussels, Oslo and Akershus, Turin, Terrassa, Lille and Lyon) and it covers key issues, including definitions for delineating metropolitan areas.

SPIMA aknowledges that despite the OECD/EC harmonised definition of FUAs, local planners tend to use different approaches to delineate metropolitan areas. SPIMA developed an alternative approach called Metropolitan Development Area (MDA). The MDA approach is particularly beneficial for local planners as it allows them to assess the relevance of the defined metropolitan area against key urban development factors including transportation, urbanisation, environment and housing.

The SPIMA study also provides guidelines for implementing an operational metropolitan planning approach based on the following key recommendations and policy implications:

[13] For more details on methodology see EUROSTAT, *Methodological manual on territorial typologies, 2018 edition,* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019.

- Effective metropolitan planning depends on a shared governance process that is more flexible and dynamic, and is at the same time clearly linked to the administrative levels of statutory spatial planning. This implies more coordination efforts and shared competencies between governmental levels (vertically) and across policy sectors/departments (horizontally).
- Implementing a metropolitan planning approach can be highly beneficial in ensuring a 'spatial fit' between the 'de jure city' and the 'de facto city'. Such an approach implies setting different foci in strategic, statutory and collaborative planning and involves eight specific 'action areas'.
- A mix of policy tools is needed to implement the metropolitan planning approach. The most relevant set of policy tools to address challenges at metropolitan scale relate to coordination and collaboration processes such as instituting metropolitan bodies to coordinate planning efforts at metropolitan scale or establishing effective collaboration process among multiple actors.
- The formal status of the metropolitan area is not a strongly determining factor for the effectiveness of metropolitan planning and governance, whereas acceptance and recognition of the metropolitan areas as such is an essential trigger for initiating metropolitan collaboration.
- EU policy is a key incentive for regional and local authorities in initiating coordinated efforts in regional and local development. An EU metropolitan policy agenda and funding instruments can support the implementation of a metropolitan planning approach across Europe, and strengthen commitment from national and regional governments.

For more information

ESPON (2018) SPIMA – Spatial dynamics and strategic planning in metropolitan areas: https://www.espon.eu/metropolitan-areas

Functional areas can be defined using criteria that are decided at national, regional or local level. Arguably, **some adaptability is required to ensure optimal strategic planning when the boundary is defined at national or regional level (whether in accordance with an existing framework or not), to facilitate better adjustment to local realities and to the strategic approach.**

In Poland, the territorial scope of SUD strategies is defined on the basis of national guidelines that set socio-economic criteria to delimit urban functional areas around regional capital cities. There is some flexibility, however, as the Lublin SUD strategy follows the same criteria but they were revised locally to include other municipalities on the basis of important functional links with the regional capital. Another example is that of the Italian Region of Veneto where the regional managing authority has defined five eligible FUAs following an adapted version of the OECD/EC methodology, but then the specific target area for the SUD strategies has been defined at local level with more flexibility.

Furthermore, **the key to successful delineation of boundaries is to have access to data that allows authorities to determine the appropriate indicators and criteria which will be used to define the area**. It is especially difficult to retrieve comparable and homogeneous data across multiple municipalities when the functional area is explicitly or uniquely defined by the strategy. Being able to identify the appropriate indicators is not only important in relation to delineating the functional area, but it is also extremely relevant in the design and monitoring phases of the strategy. Administrations can collect and harmonise data by establishing partnerships with local universities and/or research institutes, as in the case of Brno.

Online resources can also be used, such as the JRC DG REGIO tool 'Urban Data Platform+' which provides a large set of indicators at Functional Urban Area level, providing access to information regarding the status of and trends in functional urban areas across the EU[14].

Learning from practice

THE INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY OF BRNO (CZ)

The EU-funded integrated territorial investment (ITI) strategy of Sustainable Urban Development in Brno (CZ) has been set up to promote the territorial integration of the city and its wider hinterland through a balanced polycentric development.

A first challenge concerned the delineation of the metropolitan area of Brno, which was not previously defined. In order to prevent political motives dominating the process, an evidence-based method for delimiting the area was developed in collaboration with the local university. Delimitation was based on analyses of spatial arrangements and the intensity of spatial (functional) relations, using five main indicators: commuting to work, commuting

[14] https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

to school, migrations flows, public transport accessibility, and individual transport accessibility. As a result, the Brno Metropolitan Area (BMA) was defined with a boundary rather similar to the one established by the OECD-EC definition of FUA.

To overcome the lack of uniform data at the wider territorial level, Brno sought collaboration with a research team (cartographers, computer scientists and social geographers from Altimapo company, a spin-off of Masaryk University in Brno) and developed an online tool called Brno Urban Grid (BUG) for visualisation and analysis of various spatial data in the wider area. Moreover, since 2014 a series of investigations have been carried out at the metropolitan scale, including the Atlas of BMA, a sociodemographic analysis of municipalities in BMA, a transport behaviour survey of BMA inhabitants, a metropolitan indicator system, and a questionnaire among mayors of municipalities in BMA with a view to possible future cooperation.

The implementation of the ITI strategy also served as an important trigger for the establishment of inter-municipal cooperation based on governance. The cooperation was mainly formalised through a Memorandum on metropolitan cooperation, signed by Brno City, the South Moravian Region and the five largest municipalities of the metropolitan area. Multi-actor integration was ensured by the establishment of a Steering Committee which comprised key actors in the metropolitan area (city and regional elected bodies, the South Moravian Innovation Centre, universities, NGOs, the economic chamber of commerce, association of cities and municipalities, and external consultants) and it was mainly aimed at evaluating the compliance of the submitted projects with the strategy. In addition, working groups were formed on three different thematic areas, following the preparation of the individual integrated projects.

The ITI was a test bed for implementing organisational integration, in the sense of a common coordinated approach of engagement of the stakeholders of the territory based on the partnership principle. The process was not exempt from challenges that could hinder cooperation (scale imbalances among municipalities, contradictory priorities emerging from diverse territories, conflicts among decision makers). Nonetheless, it seems particularly relevant that the functional area approach has been internalised by other processes, becoming a catalyst for innovative institutional metropolitan cooperation. In particular, the municipality of Brno is elaborating a

new strategic plan 'Brno 2050', with metropolitan cooperation as one of its key pillars. Finally, the ITI strategy will be continued and updated in 2019 with only domestic resources, to cover particular strategic projects in the Brno Metropolitan Area.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=CZ-007&fullscreen=yes
URBACT (2010) Joining forces: http://urbact.eu/special-report-brno-road-more-cooperation-among-municipalities
Website of Brno Metropolitan Area: https://metropolitni.brno.cz/en/

How to achieve cooperation among actors (municipalities) when there is not a pre-existing framework?

Learning from data

The functional area approach can be found throughout all macro-regions, with the exception of a few countries. However, some differences emerge when one looks into the details. In particular, **strategies in many EU13 countries** like the Czech Republic, Estonia, Croatia, Poland and Slovakia **focus exclusively on functional areas**. In these countries[15], the option of focusing on functional areas was seized as an **opportunity to create new cooperation structures across municipal borders**, especially where such cooperation was previously weak or totally absent.

Learning from practice

THE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR NITRA (SK)

The Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) strategy in the Nitra region, Slovakia, focuses on the Nitra city and its hinterland.

One of the strengths of the SUD strategy is the definition of the functional urban area (FUA). This was defined along functional connections (links), mostly on the basis of daily commuting. The final configuration of the FUA was the result of negotiations between the

[15] In these countries (which are dominated by less developed regions), strategies have larger ESIF budgets (strategies with the ESIF budgets of more than € 100 million are almost exclusively located there) and target larger populations.

Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic and the City of Nitra. An initial definition was derived from the national guiding document 'Territorial Development Concept of Slovakia' (Koncepcia územného rozvoja Slovenska – KURS), first produced in 2001 and then amended in 2011. According to the analysis of KURS, the functional urban area of Nitra consisted in the core city and 11 villages; however the City of Nitra proposed the exclusion of two villages (Branč, Alekšince) which were not contiguous with the main core. The Ministry accepted, and the current configuration encompasses Nitra city and nine adjacent villages.

The definition of the area provided the basis for an unprecedentedly close collaboration between local and regional bodies, which that resulted in a Memorandum of Cooperation signed by the City of Nitra and the Nitra Region.

The need for such a new approach emerged during the implementation phase of the strategy, when both the Region and the City expressed a common interest in a project for a cycle route connecting several cities and villages across the functional area. The Mayor of Nitra took responsibility for the part of the cycle route within the Nitra area, while the Head of the Region was responsible for the part crossing small cities and villages. The process succeeded thanks to coordination between the two partners, with clear intentions regarding a specific project, and each with their own capacities and resources.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=SK-005&fullscreen=yes
Official Nitra Website: https://www.presov.sk/so-pre-irop.html

As the case of Nitra (SK) highlights**, when there is a lack of a common institutional framework, consensus and cooperation between different public administrations becomes even more crucial**, if obviously more challenging. Territorial integration requires the creation of **governance systems** that enable policy coherence in spatially and economically homogenous, but politically fragmented areas (see Governance chapter).

Additional resource

ADDRESSING METROPOLITAN CHALLENGES FOR THE BARCELONA METROPOLITAN AREA (ES)

This study was prepared by the Metropolitan Research Institute of Budapest for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area (ES), and it identifies the quality and strength of governance as key aspects for the success of interventions on the functional urban area level. The study focuses on two main approaches for strengthening governance across the functional area:

- the institutional approach, i.e. creating a metropolitan organisation on a fixed territorial basis with sufficiently large range of competences (as for example in Stuttgart, Greater Manchester, and Barcelona)
- the procedural approach, i.e. developing mechanisms and rules which allow for coordinated activities on a sufficiently large metropolitan territory, not necessarily in fixed territorial patterns (as for example in Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Zürich)

Regarding the institutional approach, the study provides for concrete suggestions on how existing metropolitan level organisations can be strengthened: direct election of (at least) the president of the metropolitan area, promotion of a metropolitan identity, assumption of more functions from higher administrative tiers, strengthening of economic development cooperation with the private sector, development of strategic thinking capacity on the metropolitan level, development of stronger financial tools and methods to achieve metropolitan priorities.

Regarding the procedural approach, when establishing a strong institutional basis is not feasible, the way to go may be to seek cooperation with the surrounding area through collaboration and planning agreements, which national and regional government frameworks can give substantial help with. In the case of Zürich, for example, indirect planning power was given to the metropolitan level through higher-level regulation. In Copenhagen, meanwhile, a national planning framework became obligatory for municipalities in the metropolitan area. Finally, in the Amsterdam metropolitan area, cooperation among stakeholders was encouraged using win-win Action Plans within the framework of a loosely defined strategic plan.

For more information

Metropolitan Research Institute of Budapest, *Addressing Metropolitan Challenges for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. Lessons from five European metropolitan areas: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Greater Manchester, Stuttgart and Zürich*, 2018. Available at: https://mri.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/metropolitan-areas-Barcelona-MRI-study-final-1806.pdf

As the study by the Metropolitan Research Institute of Budapest for the Barcelona Metropolitan Area explains, there are two main possibilities when establishing a governance framework for a functional area**: the institutional or the procedural approach**. Even if the choice depends on the local context, the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union (2019) **recommends adopting a soft approach** and creating a **model based on voluntary cooperation, accompanied by flexible instruments on the sub-regional level**. At the same time, a functional urban area should have **a clear legal status** and be eligible for EU funds.

Looking at various governance systems in SUD strategies, the choice of how to proceed depends on previous experience in terms of territorial cooperation.

In Poland, for example, central government guidance stipulated **two possible models for cooperation**: forming **association of municipalities,** or reaching **formal agreement between municipalities**. Some smaller municipalities that have limited experience of working together have opted for formal agreements, but some larger municipalities where there is already experience with similar initiatives have opted for the association model.

There are cases where **an institutional framework for territorial cooperation exists but it does not adequately cover the functional area**. This is the case in most French urban communities, which have well defined cooperation frameworks, but these usually cover areas that do not overlap with those defined by functional links. Barcelona and many other cities also suffer from such a situation. Existing territorial cooperation might provide a basis for the development of an SUD strategy, while in such cases there is also a need to strive for the expansion of territorial boundaries, or for planning agreements with the missing parts of the functional area.

Governance arrangements become even more challenging **when strategies involve actions on multiple scales** (see the section on neighbourhood regeneration). In many cases, even when the strategy looks at a metropolitan area, interventions often target specific neighbourhoods within that area.

In addition, there can be a problem of political legitimisation and responsibility with respect to the new territorial area, which can be even greater where there are power imbalances among the municipalities that constitute the functional area.

In order to support territorial cooperation, new bodies have emerged in a number of Member States, or existing bodies have taken on new roles. These **bodies may facilitate collaboration between different localities, take on responsibilities for management and implementation, or have advisory capacities.** If no such body exists to support a functional area strategy, the governance arrangements should be well thought over at the beginning of the process, because a coherent planning approach to the functional area requires the establishment of shared governance process to enable dynamic interaction across spatial scales, policy issues, land use functions, and a wide range of stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a functional area approach to SUD strategies to create a flexible framework for development that transcends administrative boundaries, focusing on the territorial impact of interventions, and on the real needs and opportunities of urban areas.
  - The functional area approach is suitable in areas formed by multiple municipalities where a specific interdependence (or function) occurs, which may need to be governed jointly.
  - The functional area approach should be promoted to give rise to new cooperation structures across municipal borders, especially where such cooperation is weak or missing.
  - The functional area approach is well-suited to tackle challenges relevant at that spatial scale, both traditional ones such as spatial planning, mobility and economic development, and new ones such as migration and climate adaptation.
- Base the delineation of the functional urban area on evidence-based criteria and strategic objectives.
  - Criteria can be provided by upper levels, but must be adapted according to the needs of local realities.
  - Not only functional links but also ties of cooperation and political realities should be taken into account.
- Seek scientific support with data gathering and develop indicators.
  - Universities and research institutes can carry out investigation and territorial analysis at the scale of the functional area, using the latest data collection techniques.
  - Evidence-based data and indicators are useful both in defining the functional area but also in monitoring the progress of strategy implementation.
  - Online tools such the Urban Data Platform+ can provide access to information on the status of and trends in functional urban areas across the EU.
- Create governance systems that enable policy coherence in spatially and economically homogenous, but politically fragmented areas.

- In some cases a formal structure for cooperation and coordination between different municipalities is suitable.
- In other cases, cooperation can be established through procedural frameworks for joint planning across the functional area, not necessarily in fixed territorial patterns.
- SUD financial opportunities can help start the process of inter-municipal cooperation, especially when it is an unfamiliar topic. However, that is not enough, as cooperation requires time and continued management.
- Tackle power inequalities and conflicts within functional areas, avoiding urban-core centric and economically driven strategies.
- To overcome conflict among priorities and interests, it can be useful to work on implementing specific projects, so that the advantages of cooperation become evident to all actors involved.

URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES

In this section we address:
What kind of governance arrangements can strengthen urban-rural linkages?
How to promote urban-rural linkages within a city strategy?
How to deal with heterogeneous priorities for urban and rural areas within the same strategy?

From the origin of cities, urban and rural areas were distinct and separate entities, with defined borders and functions. During the agricultural and industrial revolution, the urban-rural dichotomy still existed, but their relationship changed considerably and the development of cities and their hinterland went hand in hand. With the advent of the knowledge economy and the post-industrial city, the relationship between urban and rural areas changed again. On the one hand, functional regions have grown, incorporating smaller towns and countryside that are part of the commuting zone of larger cities. On the other hand, more peripheral rural areas and smaller cities have remained outside growing poles, losing population and lacking human capital, so that the knowledge economy has difficulties to grow there (Westlund, 2017). That means that **the traditional urban-rural dichotomy has disappeared, but the mutual interdependency and interconnections between urban and rural areas have become even more important**.

Urban-rural linkages refer to the complex set of bi-directional links (e.g. demographic flows, labour market flows, public service provision,

mobility, environmental and cultural services, leisure assets, etc.) **that connect places** (in a space where urban and rural dimensions are physically and/or functionally integrated), blurring the distinction between urban and rural, **and cross traditional administrative boundaries**.

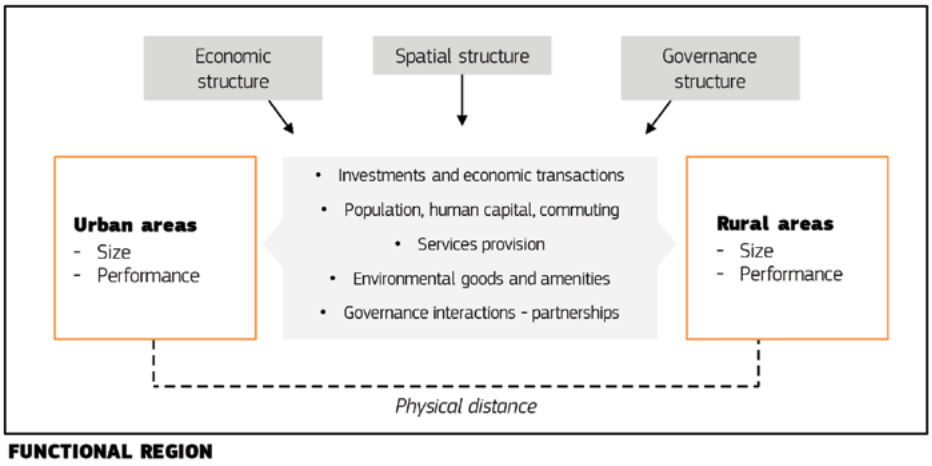

FIG. 1. Urban-rural linkages
Source: own elaboration based on OECD (2013)

These linkages can take the shape of **a city with an urbanised core and a peri-urban area** or a **functional area covering a central city and adjacent hinterland**, but they can also connect **geographically distant places through functional links** (e.g. linking agricultural production areas to urban markets).

In fact, **urban-rural linkages are not attached to a specific town size or a certain type of spatial extension**. Even if they are especially relevant for polycentric networks of small and medium-sized cities (HESPI & EUKN, 2015), they can also apply to other morphological situations from large metropolitan regions to towns in low density areas (OECD, 2013).

The urban dimension of EU policy puts a growing emphasis on urban–rural linkages. The Urban Agenda for the EU acknowledges the need to tackle urban challenges in a larger context, including urban-rural linkages and cooperation within functional areas.

A number of URBACT networks have explicitly addressed urban-rural issues (NeT-TOPIC, CityRegion.Net, LUMASEC, Sustainable Food in Urban Communities, Diet for a Green Planet, AGRI-URBAN), introducing the topic in the sustainable urban development agenda of European cities. URBACT projects show a shift in themes from land use management, urban sprawl and governance to more focused interest on low-carbon and resource-efficiency applied to food systems, and from metro regions to small and medium-sized cities.

The importance of linking urban and rural areas within the framework of EU Sustainable Urban Development is **explicitly mentioned by the 2014-2020 European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF)**

regulations and in the proposal for the post 2020 ones, and it is further confirmed by the **2021-2027 budget plan for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**.

In particular, urban-rural linkages can be supported using the **two implementation instruments ITI and CLLD**. In fact, ITI allows authorities to set up urban and territorial strategies which integrate different funds including ERDF and EAFRD (see Funding and Finance chapter). CLLD is based on the successful initiative of the LEADER programme; it can be multi-fund (it is used both in the framework of ERDF and EAFRD) and it can be used for all type of territories (urban area, rural area or mixed area) but it is especially suitable for small and medium-sized towns and settlements in rural regions (see Governance chapter).

According to EPRC, during the 2014-2020 programming period, a significant number of SUD strategies (49%) identified specific urban-rural challenges: 'the **inclusion of rural-urban linkages as a theme in a large number of SUD** and non-SUD ITI **strategies** suggests that the approach offers considerable scope to **strengthen the integration between urban centres and their hinterland**. However, the extent to which this leads to the implementation of practical measures for rural-urban linkages is not always clear' (Van der Zwet et al., 2017, p.101).

STRAT-Board data shows that urban-rural linkages are not often mentioned in surveys as one of the main topics for urban development, even if a more in-depth analysis indicates that there are many actions which clearly refer to the integration of urban and rural areas but are not categorised under the label of urban-rural linkages per se. In addition there are a few SUD strategies which combine the use of ERDF with EAFRD[16].

Learning from data

Out of the 100 strategies that have indicated urban-rural linkages as a priority topic, **76% have a city/town scope, while 21% focus on functional areas**. Moreover, 41% of the strategies cover an area with less than 50,000 inhabitants, and 50% between 50,000 and 250,000 inhabitants. This data underlines the **relevance of the issue both to small towns and middle-sized cities and conurbations**, and show that SUD can be an effective instrument for overcoming mental barriers between urban, regional and rural policy.

In Austria, for example, many strategies target functional territories formed by conurbations or networks of small towns with a population of few thousand inhabitants. By pooling resources and establishing inter-municipal cooperation these small towns are able to form a critical mass and address urban-rural linkages.

[16] In terms of integration of funds in SUD strategies addressing urban-rural linkages, data shows that while ESF is often associated with ERDF, EAFRD funding is barely used, although there is vast potential in the use of ITI, CLLD or other integrated approaches.

What kind of governance arrangements can strengthen urban-rural linkages?

Urban-rural linkages put emphasis on notions such as 'fuzzy boundaries', 'transition zones' and 'hybrid spaces' in an attempt to move away from conventional territorialities. This represents a challenge in terms of **governance arrangements**. Because urban-rural interactions encompass different geographies, they require **some flexibility in defining the scope for governing** these complex relationships, with different interventions being tailored to a wide range of challenges and spatial configurations.

It can be helpful, then, **to reframe urban-rural linkages as urban-rural partnerships**, which are based on a 'mechanism of cooperation that manages these linkages to reach common goals and enhance urban-rural relationships' (OECD, 2013, p.34).

The benefits of these forms of cooperation include the following (Pascariu & Czischke, 2015):

- achieving territorial balance, setting a common development plan;
- ensuring connectivity (both material and immaterial) and accessibility between rural and urban areas;
- promoting better spatial planning and preservation of landscapes, as well as specifically rural resources (land, culture, nature, traditions, etc.);
- promoting functional interdependence, joint economic development and mutual benefits for both areas;
- ensuring long-term political commitments for the common interests of representatives from across the political spectrum (going beyond electoral mandates), increasing political relevance and access to funds.

Shared development objectives and needs require the engagement of '**proactive networks of rural and urban actors and institutions** [...] reassembling and redefining resources and infrastructures in ways that carve out new diversified niches to produce goods and services sustainably.' (Marsden, 2009). This implies the inclusion of urban and rural stakeholders, such as public authorities – e.g. urban and rural municipalities – and private agents (firms, civil society, etc.).

Additional resource

RURBAN PREPARATORY ACTION FOR RURAL-URBAN PARTNERSHIPS: TWO KEY INITIATIVES (2010-2014)

In preparation for the current programming period, the European Commission has carried out the RURBAN preparatory action agreed by the European Parliament. The preparatory action supported two key initiatives which were intended to provide evidence of and identify the potential for urban-rural partnerships in Europe.

RURBAN found that an integrated approach to urban and territorial development must go beyond business-as-usual focus on intra-city policy coordination on the one hand and traditional rural challenges on the other hand, and consider also surrounding areas, both urban and rural. The initiative provided evidence of the potential role of urban-rural partnerships for development, and explored how EU funding through the European Regional Development Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development could best be used to support urban-rural cooperation.

BBSR (2013) PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN-RURAL DEVELOPMENT: EXISTING EVIDENCES

The initiative was supported by the study 'Partnership for sustainable rural-urban development: existing evidences', conducted by the German Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) and published by the Commission in 2013. The study presents a number of good practices from programming periods 2000-2006 and 2007-2013.

OECD (2013) – RURAL-URBAN PARTNERSHIPS: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The OECD report has a clear regional development policy background. It explores the concept of rural-urban partnerships through literature review and systemisation of the findings of in-depth case-studies, mainly from rural development policy initiatives and territorial cooperation programmes. Based on the analysis of the nature and implications of urban-rural interdependencies, it discusses different governance arrangements that can be used to manage these relationships. Finally, the report provides a set of recommendations on how policy can help rural-urban partnerships to be effective.

For more information

European Commission (2010-2014) RURBAN - Partnership for sustainable urban-rural development:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/es/policy/what/territorial-cohesion/urban-rural-linkages/

OECD, *Rural-Urban Partnerships: An Integrated Approach To Economic Development,* OECD publishing, Paris, 2013. Available at:
http://www.oecd.org/regional/rural-urban-partnerships-an-integrated-approach-to-economic-development.htm

Be careful!

Although urban-rural partnerships are based on existing functional or physical links, they do not emerge spontaneously because of different factors such as power conflict, the defensive attitude of actors involved, lack of data or simply rejection of additional administrative burden.

Another relevant dimension is therefore **the strength of urban-rural organisational integration and the degree of formal ties**, leading to three main scenarios (OECD, 2013):

- areas already formally recognised as functional regions, which are targeted by projects and initiatives;
- areas characterised by strong territorial relationships, but without any tools to carry out joint planning or management;
- areas characterised by weak urban-rural functional relationships, whose development requires new forms of co-operation.

Clearly, these three situations will require different policy actions in both the design and implementation phases. Moreover, the situation may depend on the scope of the partnership and the number of administrative units involved.

However, in general terms, urban-rural partnerships work more smoothly where **formal recognition or cooperation arrangements are provided** (e.g. by national schemes), when they take the form of any existing **territorial institutional level** (e.g. province, county, metropolitan area, functional area), and where there is **strong political leadership**.

Moreover, collaboration between local urban and rural stakeholders can be fostered through **thematic working groups and specific challenge-led missions**, which are relevant in the operationalisation phase of projects. This collaboration allows significant insights and methodologies to be gathered for urban policymaking from rural development actors.

Urban-rural integration asks requires not only horizontal cooperation, but **also coordination and incentives from the upper levels of government and from institutions**. In fact, local authorities as well

as regional governments do not often have the appropriate powers to co-ordinate the full spectrum of urban-rural links. **Technical Assistance and administrative capacity building measures can be introduced into operational programmes** to sustain the promotion of effective urban-rural partnerships, especially in the case of small and medium-size cities which lack capacity and resources. Technical Assistance allows the conditions for SUD to be set up with specific support tools for experimentation, innovation, capitalisation and strategy implementation.

Learning from practice

STRATEGIES FOR THE TOWN OF PLASENCIA (ES) AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Plasencia is a town of 40,000 inhabitants located in the north of the Extremadura region (Spain), a rural region with very low population density. Despite its size, Plasencia acts as a regional centre, offering services to more than 200,000 inhabitants living in the larger region and commuting to Plasencia on a daily basis.

The town of Plasencia is implementing two different SUD strategies, one targeting the municipality only and the other the town and its surroundings. The two independent strategies complement each other, and both address urban-rural linkages under their specific territorial scope. Althoug the two strategies are managed by different authorities, their mutual cooperation could further streghten urban rural linkages.

The SUD strategy 'Plasencia Crece Contigo' was elaborated first and targets the main town with interventions that aim to strengthen its role as the main service hub for the larger area. It mainly addresses economic transformation, knowledge transfer and challenge-oriented innovation, e.g. a health centre for elderly people living both in and outside the main town, and mobility infrastructure.

On the basis of the work initiated for the elaboration of the city strategy, the Province (Diputacion) of Caceres and the municipality of Plasencia decided to develop another SUD strategy called 'Plasencia y Entorno'. It includes 13 villages around Plasencia together with the main town, covering a total population of 53,000 inhabitants. Projects mainly address economic development by means of non-material actions for social innovation, social services, employment and training to improve the education and skill base in rural areas (for example, educational robotics workshops for children in the 12 rural municipalities of the SUD area, the DemoLab Maker workshop on digital creativity, new technologies

and Fab Labs). Projects have been chosen following the local participation groups.

The management of this larger SUD strategy is ensured by the provincial Department of Sustainable Development and Tourism, which is part of Strategic Territorial Development Services. Its mission is to provide municipalities with instruments and technical assistance to carry out territorial analysis, strategic planning and participation. It is also responsible for rural development and pursues the promotion of better rural-urban dialogue.

The 'Plasencia y Entorno' strategy presents innovative features with regards to territorial cooperation in a rural region like Extremadura.

Many policy schemes and incentives for territorial cooperation exist but they mainly address rural-rural cooperation and exclude main towns, i.e. LEADER local action groups (LAGs), cross-border partnerships with Portugal and joint communities of rural municipalities (mancomunidades). The LAGs create capacity in rural areas, but the streaming of funding keeps urban and rural areas apart. Moreover, so far the main urban centres in the region have had few incentives to develop closer links with rural areas.

Under such circumstances, SUD is the only instrument supporting urban-rural linkages. One of the main results driven by SUD has been the promotion of a new urban-rural partnership, overcoming political differences and revising existing policy arrangements. Thus, the strategy covers 12 rural municipalities that are grouped into six different *mancomunidades* (commonwealths of municipalities), and for the first time includes them in the Plasencia functional area.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, building on the positive experience of Plasencia, the Province of Caceres decided to support another inter-municipal strategy for the town of Caceres and surroundings, in line with its mission to promote balanced integration between urban and rural areas and thus support all development opportunities in the region.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet ('Plasencia y entorno'):
https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=ES-029&fullscreen=yes
Strategy local website http://dl.dip-caceres.es/convocatorias/edusi/index.php
STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet ('Plasencia crece contigo'):
https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=ES-031&fullscreen=yes
Strategy local website: https://plasenciaeneuropa.eu/proyecto/plasencia-crece-contigo/

How to promote urban-rural linkages within a city strategy?

There are cases in which urban-rural linkages are addressed by strategies which are limited in scope to the boundary of the urban area.

This can happen especially when the rural dimension is embedded in the city, because it characterises peri-urban areas, or because there is willingness to promote greening approaches within urban boundaries (e.g. urban agriculture).

However, what is even more challenging is to **promote urban-rural linkages when operations in rural areas would fall outside the boundaries of the strategy.** For many, it would simply mean that no action is possible. However, there are smart ways to address this point, which involve the need for a truly integrated mindset capable of developing novel relationships between places, themes and actors.

When the city is part of a wider territory covered by an ERDF-supported territorial strategy (non-SUD), we recommend highlighting **complementarities and possible synergies between the two** strategies.

Another possible solution would be complementing the SUD strategies with **other funds from outside ERDF territorial instruments**. For example, one could use ESF for interventions in training and employment that do not limit the beneficiaries to within strategy boundaries (see Funding and Finance chapter).

Another possibility would be to **develop complementarities with other bodies responsible for rural development strategies, like LEADER/CLLD LAGs**. This solution does not necessarily imply the application of CLLD in urban contexts, but builds on synergies with rural CLLD (as in the case of the Liepajan SUD strategy in Latvia), on the basis of innovative solutions for rural enterprises or the promotion of the knowledge and creative economy, tourism and recreation, and cultural heritage (or similar). This fosters better policy integration between Regional Policy and Rural Development Policy and related funds.

From a practical viewpoint, **synergies can be stimulated by cross-management of urban and rural instruments, encouraging the participation of urban and rural actors in the same steering bodies**. This ensures information-sharing and better coordination of urban and rural policies. For example, representatives of a LEADER programming committee could participate in the governing body of an SUD strategy and vice versa, especially in such tasks as selecting operations or evaluating programs (Réseau Europe Urbain, 2017). Urban centres (especially medium-sized towns) could be involved in the design and implementation of territorial strategies and initiatives supported by EAFRD funding.

Managing authorities that use competitive processes can also promote urban-rural linkages by using the **impact of the SUD strategy on the wide rural region beyond city boundaries** as one of the assessment criteria for selection.

Non-material actions can be more relevant than physical infrastructures. In particular, cross-sectoral relationships (see Cross-Sectoral chapter), e.g. innovation activities and promotion of value chains, education and training activities, or e-government platform, beyond material interventions, can widen the impact of SUD strategies.

Learning from practice

INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL INVESTMENT FOR GOTHENBURG (SE)

The issue of promoting urban-rural linkages when operations are restricted to city boundaries is addressed by the Gothenburg Cross-sectorial Integrated Plan for Sustainable Urban Development 2014-2020. Here, the required thematic concentration on few TOs (TO1 'research and innovation', TO3 'competitiveness of SMEs' and TO4 'low-carbon economy') for both the regional programme and SUD provided limited flexibility in defining intervention priorities. As a consequence, the SUD strategy presents a strong focus on R&D cooperation (TO1), economic development (TO3) and innovation for low-carbon economy (TO4), within the city boundaries.

Interestingly, under the SUD measure in comparison to the overall regional programme, the budget allocated to TO4 is proportionally much bigger (4.5 times) than the other TOs. This suggests that the city scale has been identified as the most appropriate for action on resource efficiency and climate change, creating opportunities for more tailored action.

More specifically, under TO4 the city strategy plans interventions promoting urban-rural linkages through innovative and 'out of the box' thinking, including:

1. cross-sectoral cooperation in hubs for testing innovative solutions in the urban and rural environment, and
2. developing a Sustainable Food Strategy for the city.

This second area of work has been established thanks to the strong connection between the SUD strategy and other existing municipal programmes such as the Municipal Environmental Program, which gives priority to sustainable food, and Equal Gothenburg which is aiming at lowering polarisation among inhabitants in fields like

health, education and income.

The design and implementation of interventions are supported by 'Urban Rural Gothenburg', which is a three-year (2017-19) ERDF-funded project for sustainable development co-led by the city of Gothenburg and Business Region Göteborg (BRG) and operating in four local hubs located in the north-eastern district of the city. 'Urban Rural Gothenburg' aims to create improved conditions for green innovation and green business development between the city and the countryside through new low-carbon approaches to local development, with particular links to food, logistics, tourism, and ecological business models. More specifically, the project primarily targets the city-region sustainable food system, which comprises the whole supply chain from food production to consumption, and explores domains like food security, food affordability and access to food. Bottom-up initiatives are supported by cooperation between the municipality, the business sector, civil society, academia, and the residents themselves. An example of actions implemented by means of the SUD measure is the new Development and Knowledge Centre for SMEs and civil society situated at the farm owned by the city. The Centre is run together with the Vastra Gotaland Region, which is also responsible for natural and cultural heritage and agricultural colleges. Another result of the project is that locally produced food is now served at municipal pre-schools. Locally produced food is one of the municipal environmental goals. The project has also resulted in a draft of a municipal Food Strategy with goals and indicators.

In addition, the SUD strategy also is linked to a LEADER/CLLD LAG called Leader Langs Gota Alv, covering five municipalities around Gothenburg and three city districts. The LAG can provide support from the Agricultural Fund (EAFRD) and the Regional Fund (ERDF) throughout the area, while the Social Fund (ESF) only covers the three districts.

For more information

STRAT-Board strategy fact-sheet:
https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/strat-board/#/factsheet?id=SE-001&fullscreen=yes
Research Forum Urban rural Gothenburg: https://www.mistraurbanfutures.org/en/project/research-forum-urban-rural-gothenburg
Leader Langs Gota Alv: https://www.langsgotaalv.se/index.php/om-leader-langs-gota-alv/geografiskt-omrade

How to deal with heterogeneous priorities for urban and rural areas within the same strategy?

Learning from data

The sample of SUD strategies tackling urban-rural linkages show the same wide range of thematic objectives covered by the total amount of strategies. This is aligned with the broad challenges identified in literature and policy analysis. Also, **it reflects a shared understanding of urban-rural integration as a framework for action instead of a thematic categorisation**.

As a matter of fact, interventions can address **economic development and innovation** (e.g. SMEs, technology transfer, ICT solutions, food system, green economy, cultural and creative industries), **service provision and public infrastructures** (e.g. education, training, social services in health and ageing, social innovation, mobility), and **sustainable management of natural and cultural resources** (e.g. water management, renewable energy, energy efficiency, climate change, risk prevention, natural and cultural sites).

Considering this differentiated landscape of possible interventions, the challenge in SUD strategies is to **deal with the heterogeneous – and often diverging - needs** created by urban-rural linkages (social, economic, environmental and spatial) and to **prioritise actions within the same strategy.**

Two main approaches are possible, on the basis of such different factors as the maturity of the integrated approach, the level of public-public and public-private collaboration, and financial availability.

- A **multi-project and widespread approach within a holistic strategy**. A number of (small or big) projects can make the difference in the local context and can strengthen the actors' feeling of togetherness, especially when there is a strong rural-urban divide. Furthermore, a large variety of projects has two advantages. On the one hand, more projects lead to the involvement of more actors and more areas/municipalities within a variable geometry. On the other, failures of individual projects can be made up elsewhere. This approach requires quite a lot of financial resources.
- Specific and **tailored thematic actions arranged using value chain logic** to promote integration, e.g. local food innovation strategy or cultural promotion based on rural assets, possibly in connection with the smart specialisation process. This solution works well when funding is low but favourable national/regional schemes are in place to promote new partnerships between rural and urban regions with the objective of giving impetus to integrated spatial development and achieving sustainable economic growth and social and

ecological development. Focused projects can be supported by the establishment of urban regional forums serving as cooperation platforms, as well as coordination and a decision-making body for the jointly developed strategy.

Additional resource

ROBUST RURAL-URBAN EUROPE – THE ROBUST CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS (2018)

This guide was developed within the framework of the H2020 research project ROBUST, which explores how synergies between rural and urban areas can be applied in practice to strengthen regional collaboration, interdependence and interconnectivity.

ROBUST works with 11 Living Labs and 5 Communities of Practice. In the Living Labs, Policy makers, researchers, citizens, business and other stakeholders develop and test new solutions for rural-urban interactions. In the Communities of Practice, the Living Labs share their findings and experiences across Europe. They are: New businesses and labour market, Public infrastructures and social services, Sustainable food systems, Cultural connections, and Ecosystem services.

The guide builds on the findings of an extensive research work addressing governance systems, processes and practices in 11 different city-regions, and provides recommendations for more effective arrangements and better policy frameworks.

Lessons from literature review, findings from case-studies and recommendations are organised around three main themes for rural-urban synergies: New Localities, Network Governance, and Smart Development.

For more information

Woods, M., Heley, J., and Goodwin-Hawkins, B., *The ROBUST Conceptual Framework: A Guide for Practitioners*, 2018. Available at: https://rural-urban.eu/sites/default/files/D1.5%20ROBUST%20Conceptual%20Framework%20-%20Guide%20for%20Practitioners.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote urban-rural linkages in all morphological situations:
  - in towns of all sizes with a physical or functional connection between urban and rural areas

- ▸ in metropolitan areas, functional urban areas and functional regions
- ▸ in networks of (especially small and medium-sized) cities.

- Establish urban-rural partnerships that bring together urban and rural stakeholders, such as public authorities – e.g. urban and rural municipalities – and private agents (firms, civil society, etc.).
  - ▸ CLLD is a tool that can be used to successfully create bottom-up partnerships.
  - ▸ Foster collaboration between local urban and rural stakeholders through thematic working groups and specific challenge-led missions.
  - ▸ Provide support and recognition to urban-rural partnerships from the national or regional level through multi-level governance schemes.
  - ▸ Introduce Technical Assistance in operational programmes to sustain the promotion of effective urban-rural partnerships, especially in case of small and medium-sized cities which lack capacity and resources.
- Complement SUD strategies with other funds outside of ERDF territorial instruments, to promote urban-rural linkages when operations in rural areas would fall outside the boundaries of the strategy.
  - ▸ Use ESF for interventions in training and employment that do not limit the beneficiaries to strategy boundaries.
  - ▸ Develop complementarities with other bodies responsible for rural development strategies, like LEADER/CLLD LAGs.
  - ▸ Stimulate cross-management of urban and rural instruments, encouraging the participation of urban and rural actors in the same steering bodies.
  - ▸ Ensure that urban centres are involved in the design and implementation of territorial strategies and initiatives supported through EAFRD funding.
- In the operational programmes, prioritise strategies that reflect functional and morphological integration between urban and rural areas.
  - ▸ This priority can be taken into account when defining the boundary of the strategy area.
  - ▸ It can also be used when establishing the criteria for selecting strategies in case of competitive procedures.
- Adopt a multi-project and widespread approach within a holistic strategy in order to strengthen the actors' feeling of togetherness, especially where there is a strong rural-urban divide.
  - ▸ This approach requires quite a lot of financial resources.
- Promote urban-rural integration using specific and tailored thematic actions, arranged along with value chain logic.
  - ▸ This approach can be adopted by local authorities seeking to address urban-rural linkages within a small budget.

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KJ-NA-29990-EN-N

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doi:10.2760/32842

ISBN 978-92-76-13673-6