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POLICY BRIEF

Role of small and medium-sized towns and cities in territorial development and cohesion

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The core mission of EU cohesion policy is to reduce regional disparities and promote long-term regional development. To achieve that goal, investments in public services, infrastructure, skills and multilevel governance have continued to drive convergence in recent years. Nevertheless, some small urban settlements far away from the capital regions have been facing structural and institutional challenges, rendering them highly vulnerable to crises and making them less likely to take up development opportunities.

This policy brief puts the sustainable development of small and medium-sized towns and cities in the spotlight, and aspires to provide policymakers at all levels, from European to local, with advice on how such settlements may contribute to more balanced territorial development, and economic, social and territorial cohesion.

The policy brief examines the EU policies targeting small and medium-sized towns and cities, and explores in more detail the relevant policy frameworks in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. It then examines success stories of the towns and cities showcased in designing and implementing public policies to achieve strategic transformation and become drivers of regional development in low-density territories.

The final chapter of the policy brief provides policy conclusions and recommendations to help small and medium-sized towns and cities achieve an optimal role in territorial development and help reinforce spatial justice.

A more detailed overview of the policies supporting small and medium-sized towns and cities, as well as the pathways pursued by the towns and cities showcased to manage their growth, can be found in the working paper of ESPON – ‘Small and medium-sized towns and cities: Policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive, and functional territories’.

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- Many small and medium-sized towns and cities in Europe have managed to implement innovative policy pathways to achieve strategic transformation and become drivers of regional development in low-density territories. Housing stock, regeneration of public buildings, business development and innovation, connectivity to nodes, and culture, education and social services are examples of areas for policy intervention to turn those towns and cities into magnets for growth.
- Apart from investment in infrastructure, intermunicipal cooperation and multilevel partnerships based on a more structured and systematic approach (e.g. a ‘territorial contract’) are indispensable factors in ensuring the inclusive development of functional territories.
- As the invigoration of small and medium-sized towns and cities becomes a key target for EU, national, regional and local policies, better access to key services of general interest and to job and educational opportunities is key to reducing territorial inequalities.
- Policies should consider a number of measures presented in the final chapter of this brief to help small and medium-sized towns and cities achieve ‘intermediation’ in territorial development and bolster territorial spatial justice.

1 The untapped potential of small and medium-sized towns and cities

This policy brief follows up on previous ESPON research (e.g. the ESPON TOWN project¹), and defines small and medium-sized towns as urban settlements between 5 000 and 50 000 inhabitants and a population density of between 300 and 1 500 inhabitants per square kilometre. It also considers small cities (with a population exceeding 50 000 inhabitants) exposed to similar socioeconomic challenges and similar attention from public authorities at different territorial levels in Europe.

These small and medium-sized towns and cities (SMSTCs) have significant roles in and potential for balanced territorial development and the achievement of common European goals.²

Over the years, they have been instrumental in providing services and supporting local development using endogenous resources and potential. However, contemporary metropolisation processes have induced different development trajectories for such towns and cities dependent on their proximity to large cities.

Some of these towns and cities grew in importance after they were integrated into a functional urban area with shared transport systems and public services. Some others benefited from offering opportunities to commute to urban regions if located in a high-speed transport corridor.

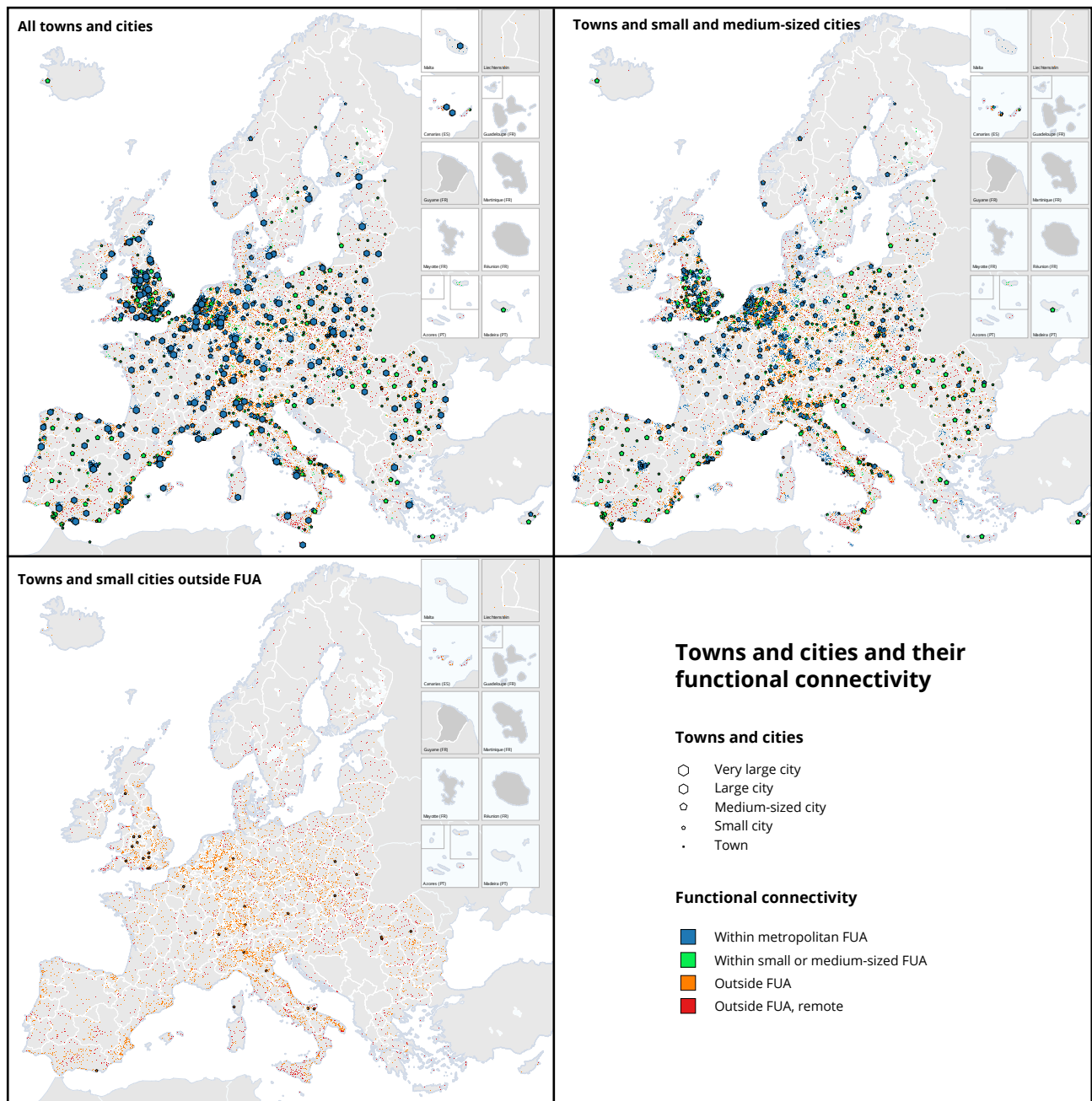
While innovation is a key determinant of long-term regional growth, some areas, farther away from the capital regions, have faced structural and institutional challenges in coping with demographic, social, economic and environmental trends, which today makes them highly vulnerable to crises and less able to tap into development opportunities. They have suffered from peripherality and decline, as they have not been able to provide the necessary resources to maintain services for the surrounding areas or act as growth poles.

To properly address structural deficiencies and develop remedial solutions, it is essential that SMSTCs be put in the spotlight, as they demonstrate an **unexplored potential** to shape tenable urban–rural relations.

This requires policy intervention in the form of integrated and place-based territorial support measures to enable all types of territory to make the most of their development assets (e.g. fostering the diversification of economic activities and smart specialisation; finding solutions for the provision of high-quality, accessible and cost-efficient public services; and promoting territorial co-operation within functional areas).³

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- 1 ESPON (2013), 'TOWN – Small and medium-sized towns' (<https://archive.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2013/applied-research/town-%E2%80%93-small-and-medium-sized-towns>); ESPON (2022), 'Denmark, small and medium sized cities' (<https://archive.espon.eu/towns%20Denmark>).
 - 2 #TerritorialAgenda (2020), *Territorial Agenda 2030: A future for all places* (https://territorialagenda.eu/wp-content/uploads/TA2030_jun2021_en.pdf).
 - 3 European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) (2015), *The trio presidency theme of small and medium-sized cities: Synthesis of the results*, The Hague: EUKN; Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) (2015), *Opportunities of cross-border cooperation between small and medium cities in Europe*, Luxembourg: LISER.

Map 1.1
SMSTCs



Note: FUA, functional urban area.

Source: ESPON.

2

EU and national policies targeting small and medium-sized towns and cities

The European perspective

As stated by the European Commission,⁴ cohesion policy provides targeted investments adapted to various local and regional contexts. It tackles many interlinked urban challenges experienced across Europe: social inclusion and the regeneration of urban neighbourhoods, sustainable urban mobility, the circular economy and housing in functional urban areas, and access to public services and digital solutions in SMSTCs and links with rural communities.

The **eighth cohesion report**⁵ highlights that better provision of public services by SMSTCs could boost economic development and improve quality of life. The **long-term vision for the EU's rural areas**⁶ observes that delivering services of general interest in rural areas of comparable quality to those in urban areas is key to maintaining equitable living standards for all citizens and across all territories. Therefore, SMSTCs can be driving forces for rural attractiveness and development and provide access to a number of services for the surrounding rural areas. The 2023 **EU Cities Forum**⁷ in Torino also highlighted the role of SMSTCs in promoting synergies with the rural environment.

Cohesion policy has been geared towards supporting cities with funds, having an invaluable impact on their development and their recovery from the recent crises.

The **URBACT IV programme** (2021–2027) supports cities to tackle the green, just and digital transitions through networking, capacity-building and knowledge-building activities. The new **European Urban Initiative**, launched by the Commission, aims to strengthen integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable development by means of innovative actions, capacity and knowledge building, policy development and communication, but it only addresses local administrative units of at least 50 000 inhabitants. URBACT and the European Urban Initiative will work in collaboration to provide a consistent range of measures to urban stakeholders and support to cities for their integrated and sustainable urban development under the cohesion policy. However, these two programmes do not feature any specific measures targeting SMSTCs.

As a territorial delivery mechanism, the **Community-Led Local Development** enables bottom-up approaches to defining a local development strategy tailored to the specific needs of an area. It fosters an integrated approach to territorial development, with the purpose of involving a large number of local representatives, while providing financial support for strategy implementation and related participatory processes. It allows a broad thematic scope and diverse areas of intervention, ranging from urban neighbourhoods to subregions.

4 European Commission (n.d.), 'How does cohesion policy support cities and local communities?' (<https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/How-does-Cohesion-Policy-support-cities-and-local-/rgzr-e44d/>).

5 European Commission (2022), *Cohesion in Europe towards 2050: Eighth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

6 European Commission (2021), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040.

7 Urban Innovative Actions (n.d.), 'Cities Forum 2023 – Together for green and just cities' (<https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/events/cities-forum-2023-together-green-and-just-cities>).

National perspectives

Spain: a dedicated policy framework to tackle the demographic challenge and the consolidation of small and medium-sized towns and cities

In **Spain**, the central government has created a specific administrative structure and implements targeted actions in aid of greater territorial cohesion and the fight against depopulation. The Spanish multi-regional operational programme 2021–2027 aims to allocate the majority of funding resources for sustainable urban development to medium-sized cities. Those responsible for the programme argue that the depopulation of rural areas and medium-sized cities, as well as the excessive concentration of the population in large cities, undermines access to public services.

The central government's mandate is realised in areas that are considered integral to national public policy, such as the promotion of **digital infrastructure**, or that require significant **investment in infrastructure**, which makes it difficult for them to be addressed solely by regional administrations or local authorities. This scheme has recently been reinforced by Spain's Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, which involves 130 measures to **combat the demographic challenge** and is promoted by the Ministry of Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge.

In the political and administrative organisation of Spain, most of the responsibility for providing basic services and public policies to promote employment and economic development belongs to the **autonomous communities**, while the municipalities generally execute plans and programmes designed at regional level. The autonomous communities are the main promoters of public policies aimed at strengthening the role of SMSTCs, with priority given to health services, mobility and transport, and the promotion of employment and economic development.

These policy intervention mechanisms helped put SMSTCs in Spain on a level **comparable to larger urban centres** in terms of service provision, while in general terms the smaller settlement centres boast a lower cost of housing and a higher quality of life. This, altogether, has led to the further growth of SMSTCs in Spain in the last 20 years.

Italy: integrated policies tailored to territorial needs

The policies and instruments in Italy that can involve SMSTCs operate within a complex multilevel governance framework, in which the national, regional and local levels play important roles. They usually target a wider territory than a specific SMSTC, and their goal can be within the broader scope of reducing the gap between large urban areas and less urbanised areas.

In recent years, Italy has seen a significant shift in territorial policies, with a growing focus on **identifying integrated policies tailored to territorial needs** and maintaining functional relations in marginalised or disadvantaged areas.

The **National Strategy for Inner Areas** adopted an innovative approach to territorial development by determining the urban centres in disadvantaged territories that could provide essential services to the population and act as development magnets. Covering over 4 000 municipalities, the strategy has been perceived as an ambitious effort to engage local communities, tap into their knowledge and collaborate with various stakeholders through a place-based and multilevel governance approach. Another example is **Italia di Mezzo** – a space set apart from metropolitan cities and inner regions enabling a focus on the role of intermediate territories.

The 2021–2027 National Programme '**Metro Plus e città medie sud**' supports social investment in 39 medium-sized cities in southern Italy that have a crucial role in regional development by performing a role similar to that of large cities. In these urban centres, the implementation of coordinated actions for social inclusion and innovation is encouraged, with the aim of improving the quality of life in suburbs and marginal areas.

Portugal: investing in human capital and innovation

In the context of the country's long-term demographic decline, SMSTCs emerge as 'links' that are capable of providing key public services and thereby capturing and rooting the population. To boost investment in human capital, Portugal has placed **capacity building and training** at the heart of its territorial policies.

The **Portugal 2030 Strategy** identifies the strengthening of **internal cohesion and external competitiveness** as a national priority for development, as it helps reduce the economic, social and environmental gaps between the country's urban areas and its rural and low-density areas. To achieve this, it focuses on combating the 'vicious circles' in which SMSTCs often find themselves trapped, which are characterised by the loss of population and employment, the deterioration of public services and increased risks associated with climate emergencies.

The **Portugal 2030 Strategy** accentuates the need to enhance **demographic sustainability** and **empower people** by, inter alia, promoting high-quality employment for young people and migrants, and guiding the ecosystem of relatively small companies towards greater technology-based specialisation. In this respect, a focus on **digitalisation, innovation and skills** will also be instrumental for SMSTCs, as it will help them compete on equal terms with metropolitan areas.

The strategy also emphasises that SMSTCs need to bolster **intermunicipal cooperation**, with the aim of creating a polycentric system with strong urban–rural linkages, and to exploit economies of scale.

Germany: Small Town Academy – capacity support for small and medium-sized towns and cities

The key funding source for German urban development is the **Urban Development Support programme** (Städtebauförderung), providing EUR 790 million a year. While it offers support to SMSTCs, it is not on a preferential basis. Smaller towns can find it hard to access funding, competing against more resourceful and experienced larger cities.

At the same time, there is a number of state-level schemes, usually on a lower scale and based on competition, pilot interventions and knowledge transfer. While European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding is only available where the relevant state decides to design programmes dedicated to urban development, LEADER funding is available in all states (except city states).

In Germany, it is increasingly recognised that the urban development policy can achieve qualitative change, for example by increasing the capacities of municipalities to participate in development measures.

One of these capacity-building instruments is the **Small Town Academy**. The academy is part of the initiative 'Small Towns in Germany', which brings together, coordinates and expands existing programmes and activities for small town development. The aim is to strengthen the functionality of small towns by offering a purpose-built platform for networking, exchanging experiences and advanced training.

3

Policy pathways showcased through success stories

The success stories of towns and cities in Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain, showcased in the ESPON working paper ‘Small and medium-sized towns and cities: Policies strengthening their role in achieving active, inclusive, and functional territories’, involve the development and implementation of innovative and efficient policy pathways for the functional organisation of territories.

Pathway 1: strategic urban transformation for achieving sustainable development models

Policies aimed at fostering quality of life tend to tackle both the retention and the attraction of active young people and families.

The success of the Spanish city Soria in that respect is due, on the one hand, to the density of cultural heritage services and activities, and, on the other, to intangible assets inherent to many small cities, such as quality of life, the balance between family life and work, strong social relationships and high levels of security for citizens. Direct access to rural and natural environments, for example in the Spanish city Villena, represents another **advantage for policies** aimed at offering an alternative to living in larger urban areas facing growing congestion and pollution.

These policies target both services for the population and more structural dimensions of urban development. The services primarily include a range of public services, especially in the health and education sectors, as seen in the Spanish city Mérida and German town Oschersleben. The latter features high-quality public spaces, dynamic and lively city centres, and high-quality and affordable housing. Soria, for instance, manages to combine a compact city model on a pedestrian scale with an ambitious cultural policy and good provision of basic services for citizens. Villena offers a well-connected urban centre, with dynamic, productive sectors, and an active social and cultural life, while Mérida shows a clear commitment to sustainability, accessibility and connectivity, being very close to the ideal example of a 15-minute city. Another interesting example comes from Oschersleben. There, policies prioritise the creation of multifunctional infrastructure combining physical construction activities with appropriate functions, making use of brownfields as much as possible.

Many small towns and cities (e.g. Saluzzo in Italy) face situations where economic wealth coexists with important sociodemographic challenges. Therefore, balanced efforts are required to tackle urban development activities such as renovating historic buildings or highlighting the city’s heritage

and revitalising the most deprived neighbourhoods. In that regard, a lack of affordable housing, including in depopulated areas, is certainly one of the most critical challenges local policies have to address to stop demographic decline.

It is not inevitable that SMSTCs face demographic shrinking. In Soria, a series of policies managed to stop the depopulation affecting the entire province, including its capital. This **new territorial dynamic** reflects the choice of Soria’s inhabitants to stay instead of moving to a larger city, and proves the attractiveness of Soria to inhabitants of other towns and villages in the province. Maintaining or developing the attractiveness of a small or medium-sized town or city has direct consequences on its surroundings, which are, in a way, unavoidable. Local policies must consider these effects.

Pathway 2: supporting territorial cooperation between small and medium-sized towns and cities

The example of the city of Saluzzo showcases how to deploy a vision that connects the development needs of a political, administrative and cultural centre with those of its surroundings (the Monviso territory), made of a network of smaller towns and villages. It promotes a clear political perspective that aims to develop **new interactions** between both material (ecosystem services, productive resources, food chains, labour and services, infrastructure networks) and intangible elements (such as spatial imaginaries and cultural hybridisations). The city of Saluzzo and the Monviso territory have demonstrated the ability to reach a critical territorial mass sufficient to ensure the effectiveness of local development strategies, deconstructing the alterity between urban and mountain areas.

In that context, local policies have enhanced the **polycentric development** of the territory through improving connectivity, generating new markets, building networks of services and infrastructure, and mitigating vulnerabilities to and the impacts of climate change.

In the Monviso territory, the organisation of key services such as schools, hospitals and transport has allowed the creation of larger catchment areas, improving the efficiency and concentration of services. In Mérida, a portfolio of services has become the driving force for the development of a significant number of satellite municipalities, thus contributing to the stabilisation of the population in the territory. Meanwhile, in Oschersleben the same reasoning resulted in the establishment of a network of medical care centres in the surrounding villages.

In some places, **integrated intermunicipal strategies** already exist. This is the case of Portugal town Fundão, which is part of the intermunicipal community of Beiras e Serra da Estrela. An institutionalised pact for territorial development and cohesion highlights the importance of organising initiatives on the multimunicipal scale, particularly in combining rurality with urban space.

However, such strategies do not always exist, and a lack of coordination and common strategy between the levels is also frequent. In Soria, as in Villena, it has been noted that the need for territorial cooperation is crucial for the delivery of services of general interest. There have therefore been calls for the better alignment of different levels of public authorities. Another issue to address is the nature of decentralisation in different countries and the distribution of competencies between territorial levels. In many countries, the decentralisation of competencies is accompanied with what local authorities consider insufficient resources to manage and offer more services.

One way to tackle this issue is to mutualise resources and offer administrative and technical support to smaller towns and cities.

Pathway 3: attracting funds and providing engineering support to foster project implementation

Even in the towns and cities showcased, which are considered success stories, administrative complexity and limited local capacities are seen as important barriers to delivering efficient policies.

In Villena, for instance, having a sufficient number of qualified technical staff at local level is perceived as crucial, not only to understand and control management processes and their time frames but also to attend to administrative issues with agility and efficiency. In contrast, it is recognised that a large part of Mérida's success as a model city is due to the notable efforts made by various agencies to develop administrative capacities to, for example, attract European funds, the management of which has allowed the development of the city at all levels. In Saluzzo, a planning office was established to obtain relevant funding (from bank foundations, national funds and European funds).

In Soria, the role played by European funds has been key to understanding the urban transformation of the city. In that regard, local policymakers agree on the need and demand for policies, plans, programmes and funds specifically targeted towards SMSTCs. Looking at the funding instruments, for example in Germany, some procedures appear to be too complex for smaller cities lacking administrative capacities. Therefore, the issue would be not designing new specific planning instruments for smaller cities, but rather **reconfiguring the broad array of existing instruments**. For instance, the financing and investment conditions of the

ERDF could be adjusted to fit smaller urban centres as well as rural territories, through the current Specific Objectives 5.1 and 5.2, beyond specific programmes such as LEADER.

As well as attracting EU funds, it seems necessary to secure other types of public funding and to attract investment flows. One measure envisaged in Fundão is creating a regional innovation and investment agency. This would enable the reinforcement of cooperation between university and industry, and the channelling of direct investments to the various SMSTCs in the region.

In Oschersleben, the choice has been made to turn the municipal company BEWOS into a key driver of urban development. The city administration provides funding, which is often used in projects managed by BEWOS. BEWOS uses its core business area of housing management to operate as a more general development agency, for example engaging as a member of the local LEADER action group.

Although these successes in urban development are increasingly recognised, more needs to be done in terms of communicating and exchanging experiences.

Pathway 4: develop economic models based on local assets

Most of the SMSTCs showcased are influenced by social, organisational and intangible capital and by place-based factors. However, the importance of the broader regional context needs to be considered. The results of ESPON TOWN confirm the importance of applying an **integrated approach to framing policies**, a position between regional determinism and territorial autonomy. Given the huge variety of SMSTCs, a place-based approach remains the preferred starting point for policies implemented in the cases studied, subject to the available local capacities.

In Soria, for instance, political commitment has been made to attain a diverse and attractive cultural policy. In addition, the conditions necessary for digital connectivity were met, making it possible to work in Soria in highly specialised sectors.

Regarding Villena, the strategy aims to consolidate a logistic node of national importance for freight transport, linked to strategies for innovation and the conversion of its traditional economic sectors and the exploration of new market niches. While the lack of labour force presents a critical challenge, the reinforcement of vocational education programmes has become a major policy pathway.

Mérida has achieved its position as a point of reference thanks to its economic model, based on sustainable and cultural touristic assets resulting from the historical and artistic value of the city's heritage, and complemented by other diverse areas of action. To accompany this development, local policies prioritise a sustainable and cohesive approach, and engage the third sector.

4 Policy advice for better spatial justice

Notwithstanding development dynamics over time, SMSTCs will remain a key player in the territorial organisation of their countries and the EU at large. Within their urban systems, they link higher and lower urban levels, establish relations with other cities and territories of the same hierarchical level and act as intermediaries between large cities and rural spaces.⁸

In that context, the relationship between larger urban areas and SMSTCs should be revisited, for example using a structured and systematic approach aimed at fighting against depopulation and inequalities and enhancing spatial justice.

Towards a new territorial contract

The national and more local examples presented in this paper illustrate that, to achieve adequate socioterritorial cohesion, it is necessary to work along different lines of action, to configure a new social, environmental and territorial pact between rural and urban areas.

The boundaries between urban and rural areas transcend the population threshold and are intermingled with factors such as the employment rate in the tertiary sector, thus overcoming the conception that demographic challenges only occur in rural areas. They are distorted in the context of a network of municipalities, intermediate cities, county capitals and conurbations that feed off each other inexorably.

In the commitment by the Spanish government to promoting SMSTCs, the need to balance the population across territories manifests itself, in turn, in a proposal for a new **territorial contract**, which could serve as a model in many other institutional contexts. It is thought that the contract will be **an integrative policy instrument for rural and urban areas** and will facilitate the achievement of inclusive and functional territorial development.

This new territorial contract should contribute to the preservation of biodiversity, the provision of public services, and the redistribution of opportunities and wealth, to care for the territory and the most vulnerable people, to guarantee gender equality and to contribute to the retention of talent, especially young people. This new pact will be based on the **development of territorial and supramunicipal strategies** using an approach where cities and towns cease to be isolated subjects, becoming part of an organic territorial unit of planning and co-management that can maximise their self-sufficiency and resilience because of their diversity and multifunctionality. The approach will identify intermediary cities as catalysts for greater urban–rural structuring.

⁸ Vilagrasa, J. (2000), *Ciudades medias y ciudades intermedias: posicionamiento en la red urbana y procesos urbanos recientes*, Lleida, Spain: Universidad de Lleida.

Territorial contractualisation may be just one specific way to govern territories; however, the multilevel and cross-sectoral partnerships it fosters are critical to making SMSTCs the stabilisers of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the regions where they are situated.

Cross-cutting policies are required to achieve active, inclusive and functional territories in line with the objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030.

The following list of **policy advice** provides an opportunity for discussion on the optimal combination of measures to help SMSTCs carry out intermediation in territorial development and bolster spatial justice.

- Foster polycentric development and promote functional urban–rural spaces to boost mobility dynamics, the provision of services, support for entrepreneurship and access to strategic routes in line with the idea of a 30-minute territory (where basic services can be accessed within 30 minutes).
- Apply an integrated policy approach to develop functional areas served by SMSTCs, paying due attention to understanding intra-territorial flows and synergies in order to generate added value in strategic sectors of the economy.
- Structure territorial development programmes and tools with a more flexible definition of the urban and rural frontiers, not limited to the size of population in the very urban settlement.
- Design financial instruments at both European and national levels to facilitate urban–rural projects managed by intermediary cities (regardless of the number of inhabitants).
- Re-tailor urban development programmes in the context of cohesion policy to strengthen the links between cities and their rural surroundings. The funds dedicated to this objective, especially those from the ERDF, must be used to identify synergies between territories.
- Reinforce the role of SMSTCs in the green transition on account of the vast environmental capital of their territories.
- Address specific development needs of areas with socioterritorial vulnerabilities by invigorating their urban centres to enable them to act as nodes of territorial innovation, well connected with their surrounding space and providing essential services to the population.
- Gear public funding towards increasing resilience of SMSTCs against various global shocks that could endanger their development pathways and escalate spatial polarisation.
- Boost capacity building, for example by facilitating mutual learning and networking between public authorities, and provide tailored funding mechanisms (through European policy instruments and national/regional support), to help SMSTCs fulfil their recognised role in achieving active, inclusive and functional territories.
- Develop synergies of governance and institutional cooperation that incorporate the diversity of local areas, with emphasis on the management of common elements linked to strategic services.
- Strengthen intermunicipal cooperation based on shared social, economic and environmental interests; and foster intermunicipal management and other innovative horizontal collaboration models to provide access to both services of general interest and specialised services in a wider functional area.
- Establish local development agendas that are coherent, flexible and cross-sectoral, and provide adequate financial resources for setting up multidisciplinary technical teams.
- Stimulate a participatory approach to pursuing the transformation of local development, based on innovation, the use of territorial capital and internationalisation. Involve various age cohorts in decision-making processes.
- Provide dedicated evidence and data to track the development pathways of SMSTCs, to enable the implementation of place-sensitive development measures.

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