



# Territorial Agenda 2020 put in practice

Enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of Cohesion  
Policy by a place-based approach

Executive summary

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## Background

Though firmly structured along thematic priorities, Cohesion Policy 2014-2020 calls for the adoption of a place-based approach to ensure an effective delivery of the Europe 2020 strategy by means of a greater awareness of the territory. While dedicated instruments (in particular Integrated Territorial Investments and Community Led Local Development) provide a specific framework for implementing some of the place-based principles, notably integration of sectors and territorial dialogue, its implementation remains a challenge, in particular in some policy areas traditionally place-blind (such as for example energy, R&D, education). Out of an inner circle, there is little awareness and perhaps even poor understanding of what the place-based approach is about, especially when it comes to putting those principles into practice.



Against this background, evidence from the field shows that interventions inspired by the place-based approach are already evident on field and demonstrate positive results. Interestingly, the adoption of some of its elements emerges as a necessary response to more traditional but in some circumstances less effective approaches (typically sectoral and top-down policies). At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, good practice examples show that a place-based approach might be enforced without being explicitly acknowledged, and thus failing to reap its full benefit, for example in terms of transferability potential.

## Objective

The motivation of the study stems from the observation that there is a need to put flesh on the bones of the key principles of the place-based approach which are often recalled in strategic documents of territorial policies in the EU but often disregarded when planning and implementing those policies on the ground. The aim of the study is to provide practical examples of the added value as well as the challenges posed by putting the place-based approach into action.

Twenty one case studies, selected according to a convenient sampling procedure relying on direct (personal experience of

team's experts) and indirect (from secondary sources) knowledge of interesting cases implemented in the past programming periods (starting actually even long before), provide the bulk of evidence from which some key conclusions are drawn. The selected cases are not necessarily best practice in their field, but rather successful initiatives showing interesting design and implementation practices which best illustrate the advantages of a place-based approach.

### Box 1 Twenty-one case studies

1. Reshaping regional innovation system (Apulia, Italy)
2. Integrated strategy against social exclusion (Terrassa, Spain)
3. Mainstreaming green economy (Malta)
4. Regenerating an innovation dock (Rotterdam, the Netherlands)
5. Renewable energy as growth engine (Burgenland, Austria)
6. Integrating education policies (Antwerp, Belgium)
7. Logport - Restructuring territorial industrial vocation (Duisburg, Germany)
8. A vision of archipelago town (Rennes, France)
9. Baltadapt – A shared strategy for climate change adaptation (Baltic countries)
10. Guadalinfo - ICT for territorial and social cohesion (Andalusia, Spain)
11. Horta à Porta - Gardens for territorial integration (Porto Region, Portugal)
12. From restructuring to the village concept (Limerik, Ireland)
13. Superfast Cornwall Programme - Beyond the 'big build' (Cornwall and the Isle of Scilly, UK)
14. Unification of archaeological sites - Cultural heritage inspiring urban regeneration (Athens, Greece)
15. Enforcing a pact for employment (Moravian-Silesia region, Czech Republic)
16. COAST project - Biodiversity as territorial asset (Dalmatian Coast, Croatia)
17. Rehabilitation of the manor - Investing in territorial cultural traditions (Lukšiai, Lithuania)
18. Place-based rural policy (Finland)
19. Integrated strategy for local public service (Jaslo, Poland)
20. Strategy for the Danube Delta Area - Paving the way for ITI (Danube Delta, Romania)
21. Bio Based Europe -Innovation and training for a bio based cluster (Flanders - Belgium and Zeeland-Flanders – the Netherlands)

## Findings

There is not a unique way to implement the place-based approach. Nevertheless, although the impression is that the initiatives reviewed emerge from unique conditions driven by specific local opportunities and are thus, by definition, untransferable, there are a number of common keys that can be detected and pointed to as a footprint for decision makers. There are several aspects that, to some extent and with different degrees, can be part of a place-based approach. While identified as distinguished features, they are however often combined and mixed in a reinforcing aggregation.

Key findings related to such features are the following:

- 1. Valuing and reviving territorial identity as a unique asset is the starting point of every place-based initiative.** Territories have cultural traditions, productive vocation and natural assets nourishing their identity and development potential. Place-based approach emerges as a response to the need to preserve and value such characteristics in the most appropriate way, while adapting to an environment posing more and more demanding challenges. In some cases, where a major effort is needed for reviving or reshaping strategies, genuine scrutiny and the willingness to engage in a vision for the common good are key ingredients to be ensured.
- 2. Ambitious strategies naturally expand beyond geographical and sectoral boundaries.** Needs and challenges are not confined into administrative boundaries and therefore call for integrated policies. For this reason policy design and implementation should be defined at the most appropriate territorial level to deliver the intended change. The guiding principle is to select the territorial level aggregating the relevant partners with stakes and responsibilities over the aspects to be tackled. In addition, an effective policy response may require an integrated approach combining soft and hard measures as well as a holistic approach.
- 3. An open governance system is the instrument to ensure a smooth implementation of the initiative.** Place-based initiatives are inherently participatory and therefore require a policy dialogue to be in place and clear rules of the game in order to avoid free riding, overlapping or fragmented actions. Exogenous pressures have an important triggering effect (and Cohesion Policy has a pivotal role in this respect), while engaging local actors and making them part of the deal is a key requirement to ensure ownership and social acceptance.
- 4. A strong leading capacity is needed to steer the process and ensure a long term commitment to results.** A dedicated body or agency guaranteeing ownership and sticking to the strategic objective is a common solution. Flexibility and user-orientation can be better ensured in this case, which enhances the chance of success. Negotiation and consensus building should be enforced throughout the whole process, from initial design to implementation.
- 5. Experimenting and learning-by-doing are natural ingredients in place-based approaches.** Processes can be long since trust and credibility need time to develop. At the same time, experimentation and piloting phases are necessary in order to learn by doing and test innovative ideas to select the most promising ones. Lying outside the scope of programming and



evaluating periods can create tensions with the result orientation but, once a solid partnership is in place in a given territory, synergies spread into all policy areas.

## Conclusion

While some elements point to the usual commons of a place-based approach, such as an integrated way of working and multilevel dialogue, other aspects are novel and shed light on the complexity and the experimental nature of such approaches. All of them however point to a clear need of **changing the mindset of decision makers moving from a more administrative and compliance-driven attitude to a more result-oriented and entrepreneurial one.**

Since there is no one-size-fits-all rule for place-based approaches, there is a need to develop practices and strategies which are suited for each specific territory, adapting them with flexibility and pioneering behaviour. This may require a major effort but evidence shows that it pays off in terms of delivering change. Results in terms of an accelerated delivery process, smooth implementation, efficient leveraging of territorial resources, more focused strategies and wide social acceptance are evident achievements reported in the analysed cases.

The role of ESI Funds 2014-2020 and their new tools CLLD and ITI in guiding and offering a structured framework for place-based initiatives is particularly relevant. Some of the cases show how the implemented initiatives were inspired by the same logic and relied on the same tools that are now systematically promoted for integrated territorial development. More in general, the role of Cohesion Policy as enabler and catalyser of territorial strategies is evident in most of the case studies and suggest that Cohesion Policy programmes may well be the most suitable policy setting for experimenting and implementing the place-based approach.





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