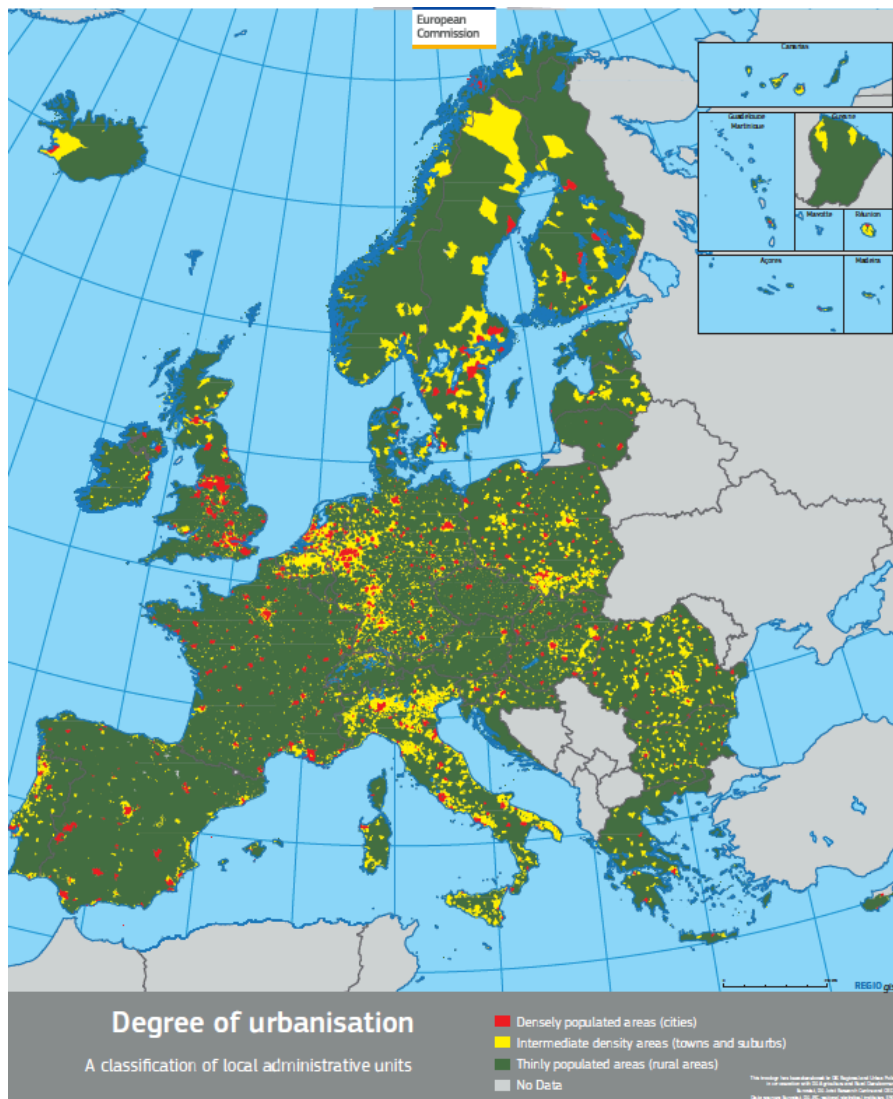


The Trio Presidency Theme of Small- and Medium-Sized Cities

Contributions of the Italian and Latvian Presidencies



The Presidency Trio Theme

Small- and medium-sized cities in Europe have been less explored both in research and in policies.

Policy attention is primarily focused on larger cities. At the same time, they are the prevailing type of settlement and a large share (66%) of the European urban population lives in urban areas with less than 500,000 inhabitants.

For these reasons, the Presidency Trio Italy-Latvia-Luxembourg decided to draw attention to the role, challenges and potentials of small- and medium-sized cities within the framework of territorial cohesion and urban policy.

Each Presidency selected its own priorities within this broad theme: small- and medium-sized cities and their role in inner areas (Italy), their economic growth potential (Latvia) and their role in cross-border polycentric metropolitan areas

The Italian Contribution

The Italian Presidency contribution focused on the urban dimension in territorial cohesion: the theme of “inner areas”. This theme was discussed during the NTCCP meeting in Rome, 3 July 2014, and the DG meeting on Territorial cohesion and urban development of 25 September 2014, Milan. In addition, there was a discussion on cohesion policy in general in the 3347th General Affairs Council meeting, 18-19 November 2014, Brussels.

The focus was on how to improve the accessibility to basic services in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas, far from large- and medium-sized cities. Inner areas are functionally defined as areas where accessibility (in terms of travel-time) to public services is insufficient to provide citizens with an acceptable quality of living and economic wellbeing. The theme of ‘inner areas’ draws attention to the function of (small) urban centres for their hinterland, linking the themes of urban development and territorial cohesion.

A territorial agenda promoting a polycentric urban structure, a focus on rural-urban relations, and applying a place-based approach offer guidance for a territorial policy that pays attention to the challenges and opportunities of inner areas. The Italian national strategy for inner areas is an example of such a policy. European Structural Funds and especially the instrument of Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) offer possibilities for financial support.

The Latvian Contribution

The Latvian Presidency contributed by discussions during UDG (11 March 2015) and DG (6 May 2015) meetings in Riga on the role of small- and medium sized urban areas in overall territorial development. These efforts cumulated in the Riga Declaration “Towards the EU Urban Agenda” signed during the informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Cohesion policy, Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters, 10 June 2015. A research report on the challenges and potentials of small- and medium-sized urban areas, prepared by the HESPI institute of the Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences in Latvia and the EUKN, fed into the discussions and the Declaration. Agreement on the Riga Declaration is a significant step towards the development of the EU Urban Agenda. In addition the Declaration emphasises the role of small- and medium-sized cities and urban areas that must be taken into account when developing and implementing the EU urban agenda.

The Latvian Presidency theme is complementary to the Italian contribution, by focusing on all types of small- and medium-sized cities (not only isolated, but also networked and agglomerated ones) and by linking the theme to the EU urban agenda. The Riga Declaration underlines the important economic and social functions of these centres for their inhabitants and their surrounding areas, as well as their particular challenges and potentials. Small can be more. There are many examples of vibrant small- and medium cities providing better living conditions than larger ones. Small- and medium-sized cities offer opportunities to balance economic activity and quality of life aspects, flexibility to adapt and agility for policy innovation and experimentation.

To make the most of their potentials, small- and medium-sized urban areas have to develop smart strategies that take in to account their specific assets and strengths, in co-operation with neighbouring small, medium and large urban and/or rural areas, to foster diversification and smart specialisation and to find solutions for provision of quality public services. To develop their potentials they need support from regional, national and European governments, to improve connectivity and accessibility, to promote innovation and entrepreneurship, to strengthen regional co-operation and capacity building, and to improve the access to financial resources. Because of the interrelation interdependency of these cities with regional contexts, support measures need to be provided by integrated and place-based approaches. At EU level, EU funds and instruments, especially Community-led local development (CLLD), Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), together with

Integrated actions (IA), offer possibilities that match the needs of small- and medium-sized urban areas.

Link with EU urban agenda and Cohesion policy

The Italian and the Latvian presidencies have managed to establish a link between the urban agenda and territorial cohesion, and acknowledgment of:

- The significance of small- and medium-sized cities for achieving strategic EU goals, especially regarding sustainability, and fighting poverty and social exclusion. This means recognition of the aggregate economic development potential of small- and medium-sized cities, as the backbone of Europe's territory.
- The importance to recognise and understand the diversity of types of cities and urban areas in Europe, including the role of small and medium-sized cities in all relevant themes of the EU urban agenda.
- The significant role of small and medium-sized cities for balanced territorial development, thus introducing a territorial perspective in the EU urban agenda.

Luxembourg's contribution

The forthcoming Luxembourg Presidency will contribute to the theme of small and medium cities with its priority of cross-border polycentric metropolitan areas. In addition, it intends to strengthen the combined message from the Presidency Trio by producing a synthesis report of the major results of the Trio, to be used as input for various discussions during the Presidency. In addition, the synthesis report should establish a link to the forthcoming Trio Presidency of the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta, especially through the process of developing the EU urban agenda. EUKN supports the Luxembourg Presidency by compiling this synthesis report.

For more information

mart.grisel@eukn.eu

alfons.fermin@eukn.eu

www.eukn.eu