



WESTERN BALKAN NETWORK  
ON TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

## How can Western Balkans contribute to the implementation of Territorial Agenda 2030?

A Position of Members based on the Conclusions of the 4th Annual Meeting  
of The Western Balkans Network on Territorial Governance (TG-WeB)

23.6.2021

The Territorial Agenda 2030 (TA 2030), adopted during the German EU Presidency in December 2020, underlines the importance of strategic spatial planning and calls for strengthening the territorial dimension of sector policies at all governance levels. As the pandemic threatens to further intensify spatial and socioeconomic inequalities in Europe, the Territorial Agenda 2030 can provide important impetus for a prosperous future-oriented restart, while also contributing to the advancement of the current differentiated processes of EU integration.

Although the Western Balkans are not yet part of the EU, the TA 2030 is *equally relevant to territorial governance in the area*. Furthermore, the text of the TA 2030 conveys the message of its proponents also outside the EU, stating that “We encourage our colleagues in neighbouring countries to take note of the Territorial Agenda and join us in putting it into practice at European, transnational, macro-regional and cross-border levels. Everyone is welcome to use the Territorial Agenda within their countries at national, regional and local levels, and in cooperation with other countries” (TA 2030, p.1). In this light, we argue that **taking part in the TA 2030 implementation would empower the relevant stakeholders and strengthen the European perspective of the countries in this part of Europe.**

The members of TG-WeB (the Western Balkans Network on Territorial Governance, <http://tg-web.eu/>), have met in the occasion of their 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting in June 2021 devoting their discussion to the necessity and value for Western Balkan’s countries and institutions *to participate in the implementation of the TA 2030*. The participation can be achieved through the involvement into *on-going pilot actions*, or through the initiation of *new actions of interest for the EU and the Western Balkans*.

### 1. On-going pilot actions

While all on-going pilot actions are very relevant for territorial governance in the Western Balkans, four of them bear higher significance to the region, due to regional territorial specificities and trends of development.

1. A future for lagging regions: The countries are highly monocentric and disparities are elevated and growing.
2. Region-focused Territorial Impact Assessment: Current policies mostly disregard territorial resources and specificities.
3. Small places matter: There is an untapped development potential beyond capital cities and main regional centres.
4. Climate change adaptation and resilience through landscape transition: Climate change and expected risks and impacts constitute a challenge that the region finds hard to frame and face.

## 2. Topics of particular importance for Western Balkans

The members of TG-WeB have in addition identified a number of topics that are of particular importance to territorial governance in the Western Balkans and to the implementation of the TA 2030, which have so far not been addressed by on-going pilot actions. These topics, alone or combined, contribute directly to the enhancement of quality of life in the region and to the adoption of EU policies.

1. **Sustainable accessibility, road and railway infrastructure, and digital connectivity:** It includes accessibility in terms of sustainable mobility and enhanced connectivity of Western Balkans to the rest of Europe, as well as digital connectivity between places and communities in the Western Balkans.
2. **Definition and governance of (functional) urban areas:** Defining and delimiting urban areas so that territorial development policies are tailored for cities is a challenge. Moreover, as the urban-rural continuities expand in size and functions, the growing complexity requires flexible governance configurations that stretch beyond administrative borders.
3. **Sustainable tourism:** Moving away from mass tourism towards place-based models as alternatives that promote balanced coexistence of communities with nature and biodiversity, is of key importance both for coastal and mountainous regions in the Western Balkans.
4. **Societal dialogue on territorial cohesion:** How can a vision for territorial cohesion be shared across and among idiosyncratic societies that share the region and its history, but are confronted with yet-to-mature institutions and with complex east-to-west geopolitics. Societal dialogue is key to overcoming barriers and the civil society can play a critical role in relation to this.
5. **Coordination of science and education, relevant for territorial governance:** Coordinating, sharing, exchanging and amplifying knowledge and experience between various fields of education, relevant for a place-based approach towards territorial governance and spatial development, is needed.

Finally, three horizontal themes are highly relevant for Western Balkans, and could be addressed through any topic-based action for the implementation of the Territorial Agenda:

- Spatial planning and its governance,
- Territorial quality of life,
- Shrinking population and brain drain.

## 3. Request to the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Through this position, we, the members of the TG-WeB kindly request the incoming Slovenian EU presidency, in the field of territorial cohesion, to consider the interest of the actors from the Western Balkans to participate in implementing the TA 2030 and to forward such interest to the key players in members states and the Network of Territorial Cohesion Contact Points, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Investment Bank and other applicable working groups and intergovernmental bodies. We would be happy to present and elaborate our proposals at any relevant occasion and work in/with any related initiative that supports the engagement of state and sub-national authorities from the Western Balkans in the implementation of the TA 2030 in the region, in cooperation with EU Member States.

We are ready and willing to investigate venues of cooperation either through participation in the current pilot-actions, or through engagement in upcoming actions that best connect the EU and Western Balkans interests in favour of future integration, and as a means of overcoming barriers to opening negotiations.